

ACTON PLANNING DEPARTMENT
472 Main Street
Acton, MA 01720

TOWN OF ACTON

SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE PLAN

MARCH 1995



Prepared by the

South Acton Village Planning Committee

and the

Acton Planning Department

in cooperation with the

Acton Planning Board

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INTRODUCTION

In 1990, the Town of Acton voted to adopt the Goals and Objectives of the Acton Master Plan. One of the Master Plan's objectives was to develop a detailed plan for South Acton Village.

In December of 1991, the Acton Planning Board appointed the South Acton Village Planning Committee. Its members are residents of South Acton, as well as a representative of the Planning Board. The committee was assisted by the Town's Planning Department staff. The South Acton Village Planning Committee was responsible for developing this comprehensive planning document for South Acton Village. It is a supplement to the Acton Master Plan and should be consulted as a guide for future development within South Acton Village.

PLANNING PROCESS

Several of the South Acton Village Planning Committee members were also members of the South Acton Revitalization Committee (SARC). SARC was formed by the Acton Board of Selectmen in the early 1980's to develop a plan for improvements designed to address specific infrastructure issues preventing revitalization in and around South Acton Village. The most pressing of these issues were failing septic systems, traffic and pedestrian safety at the School Street/Route 27 intersection, and the Route 27 railroad bridge repair. SARC completed a plan for revitalization, along with recommendations to the Board of Selectmen. While the major infrastructure problems still need to be resolved, SARC initiated several citizen activities, including the South Acton clean-up day held annually in May.

The South Acton Village Planning Committee included SARC's earlier recommendations, specifically, the Route 27 railroad bridge repair, improvements to traffic and pedestrian safety, and development of a sewer district as major goals for the South Acton Village Plan. These, along with the other goals, were developed from resident input received through a citizen's survey and at public forums. The Goals can be achieved through the implementation of action recommendations which accompany each major goal.

An overview of the South Acton Village Plan, along with amendments to zoning articles will be presented at the 1995 Annual Town meeting. The South Acton Village Planning Committee is convinced that the resolution of the major infrastructure problems will stop the decline of South Acton Village. Further, the committee has developed the plan document as a guide to ensure that future change (residential and commercial) is compatible and consistent with the size and character of South Acton Village and the surrounding community.

The South Acton Village Planning Committee's past and present members are: Roger Andrews, Betsy Eldridge, Sushama Gokhale, David Hill, Sam Manka, Janice Fay Molnar, Robert Pion, William H. Shupert III, Peggy Wargelin, Christopher Tolley, and Sandra Whaley. Staff: Roland Bartl, AICP, Town Planner; Donna Jacobs, Assistant Planner.

THE PLANNING AREA

Although the Planning Area for the South Acton Village Plan extends over approximately one square mile (*Figure III.1.3*), the South Acton Village Planning Committee focused its efforts primarily on South Acton Village itself. For the purpose of this plan, the village is defined as the area immediately surrounding the intersections of Main Street with School Street, Central Street and High Street, and includes the streets, land and buildings in the immediate vicinity as shown on *Figure III.1.3*. All areas beyond this boundary are generally referred to herein as the surrounding neighborhoods. This is an approximate boundary and certainly it could be delineated in different ways. However, the purpose here is to define the village in the context of this document. It should be noted, that these village boundaries are different from any existing or proposed regulatory boundaries such as the South Acton Village (SAV) zoning district.

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PART I

ACTION PLAN

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 1992, the South Acton Village Planning Committee mailed survey forms to all households in South Acton Village and the surrounding neighborhoods. Business surveys were also conducted. The surveys had a high response rate demonstrating a genuine interest in the South Acton Village planning process. The survey responses were tabulated and summarized by the committee. In June of 1992, a well attended public forum was held to receive more direct input from residents and businesses on key issues in South Acton. The committee also reviewed the previous work of the South Acton Revitalization Committee (SARC). In July of 1994, the Committee released the Draft South Acton Village Plan. The draft was circulated in South Acton and among all Town boards, committees, commissions, and departments. The Committee held two more public forums in October and November 1994 where it presented the draft plan and received public review comments. It also presented and discussed the draft plan at meetings of the Board of Selectmen, the Planning Board, and the Chamber of Commerce. Finally, the Committee invited town department heads to discuss their concerns and recommendations individually with the committee. From all this information the committee formulated the overall planning goals and specific action recommendations for South Acton Village as presented herein.

Section 1 of the Action Plan lists each of the goals and objectives of the South Acton Village Plan. The order in which they are listed does not indicate that one goal is more important than any other. In the following sections, each goal has been grouped into major issue categories or themes, and the committee has summarized the major issues which support reasons to accomplish the goals. Each goal is followed by related action recommendations. The action recommendations in this plan are specific tasks that have been identified by the Planning Committee as important steps to achieve the overall planning goals for South Acton Village. They should be taken seriously.

Although each of the action recommendations is listed only once, many of them could be listed under most or all of the major goals. The various improvement needs are strongly interrelated. The South Acton Village Planning Committee believes that they will stimulate each other when implemented. The action recommendations are prioritized. Policy and decision makers in Acton should give the very high and high priority recommendations the appropriate attention. In the opinion of the South Acton Village Planning Committee, the other action recommendations do not bear this high degree of urgency. Nevertheless, they are important and should not be ignored. They should be accomplished as opportunities arise. For instance, specific lower priority recommendations concerning street and sidewalk improvements could be accomplished

during the course of street resurfacing or reconstruction projects, which come due in any event. Some recommendations may contradict other recommendations in this plan. This is normal for any plan, and reflects the incorporation of diversified public views and opinions. Hopefully, the priority levels assigned to each recommendation will provide some guidance in this regard.

It is understood that the needs expressed in this document must be weighed in the context of the needs of the entire Town of Acton. Clearly, the action recommendations cannot be implemented all at once. Rather, several of them will need a detailed strategy for implementation in order to achieve results within a reasonable period of time. Infrastructure projects will need more planning, design and engineering efforts. In some cases alternatives or modifications to the specific recommendations may be found to better achieve the desired results.

Many of the action recommendations can be implemented by residents. On the other hand, some of the action recommendations are not within the authority of South Acton residents, the Board of Selectmen or Town departments. An example of this is the replacement of the Route 27 railroad bridge. In these cases, it is critical that the Town leaders exert influence with the appropriate state and/or federal legislators and agencies to facilitate resolution of a specific issue.

In the case of the Main Street bridge over the rail road, which is owned by the State, this strategy seems to have worked. Following a long ten year wait, during which the bridge kept deteriorating, this bridge has now been advertised for replacement, and the project includes the reconstruction and signalization of the School Street intersection with Main Street. Several action recommendations specifically refer to, or otherwise involve the bridge and the intersection. These recommendations are made with the understanding that the detailed design of the project is still negotiable, as the State Executive Office of Transportation Construction has assured the Town. The action recommendations herein express what the committee feels are the most desirable features that should be included in the construction design. But, in no event should these recommendations be viewed as providing the means to prevent or delay the project. For a detailed discussion of action recommendations involving regulatory changes and proposed for implementation at the 1995 Annual Town Meeting refer to Part II, Section 1. The major very high and high priority capital improvement recommendations are discussed in Part II, Section 2.

Upon the South Action Village Plan's adoption by the Acton Planning Board, the various action recommendations will be forwarded to the appropriate town boards and departments. This will allow the Town decision makers and personnel to focus attention and resources, as available, on critical or high priority actions in South Acton which support the overall South Acton Village Plan goals.

SECTION 1

SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE PLAN GOALS

- GOAL 1** **Improve the South Acton Village character to restore a sense of place and community focus.**
- GOAL 2** **Preserve, maintain and restore the historic buildings in South Acton Village.**
- GOAL 3** **Clean up and improve the appearance of buildings, structures, yards and public spaces in South Acton Village.**
- GOAL 4** **Build a sewage collection system and treatment facility serving South Acton Village and its surrounding neighborhoods, to alleviate the severe problem with septic systems, to help revitalize the village and to clean up Fort Pond Brook.**
- GOAL 5** **Encourage small business development in South Acton Village.**
- GOAL 6** **Promote a diversity of housing in South Acton Village and its surrounding neighborhoods.**
- GOAL 7** **Improve and expand the system of sidewalks and generally improve pedestrian safety, convenience and comfort in South Acton Village and its surrounding neighborhoods. Build bike ways where possible.**
- GOAL 8** **Improve automobile traffic safety in South Acton Village.**
- GOAL 9** **Maintain and improve the commuter parking lot and train services for Acton residents and residents of surrounding towns.**
- GOAL 10** **Protect and maintain existing public open spaces and the remaining farm land in South Acton Village and its surrounding areas. Develop additional public open space and park land bordering Mill Pond and Fort Pond Brook.**

SECTION 2

VILLAGE CHARACTER

GOAL 1 IMPROVE THE SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE CHARACTER TO RESTORE A SENSE OF PLACE AND COMMUNITY FOCUS.

Issues:

Many area residents recognize the historic value, beauty and potential of some of South Acton's buildings, particularly of Exchange Hall in the heart of the village. Today that heart, which once was the village square, functions as a busy street intersection (Main & School Streets) where vast areas of pavement leave little or no room for any activities other than driving cars. This intersection still bears the name 'Quimby Square'. If a sense of place and neighborhood focus is to return to South Acton Village, the square and the immediately surrounding streets must be designed to better accommodate pedestrians along with the automobiles, and to invite people to spend time walking in the street. An attractive village square will help stimulate renovations, improvements, and the necessary maintenance of private properties in the village.

The village has a limited amount of space for car parking. It experiences heavy traffic during rush hours. To enhance the village's function as a neighborhood center, it needs links to surrounding neighborhoods, which allow residents to leave their cars at home. This requires new sidewalks, walkways and bikeways.

Other important elements of a village or neighborhood center are its businesses and the presence of people living in and near the village itself. The presence of residents adds life and vitality to the village and provides a customer base for small businesses located in the village.

Action Recommendations:

1.1 very
 high
 priority

To address existing waste water disposal problems and to accommodate a revitalization with moderate additional growth, install an adequate and expandable sewer collection and treatment system for South Acton Village.

1.2	very high priority	<p>Ensure that the reconstruction and signalization of the Main and School Streets intersection does facilitate the creation of a village square at this intersection. Pavement widths and turning radii should be kept to the minimum necessary for vehicular movements. Instead of traffic islands in the middle of the street, extra space should be dedicated for pedestrian use on the sides. Particularly, plenty of off-street space should be carved out in front of the Exchange Hall, which is the most prominent historic and architectural center piece of the village, to ensure its visual and functional connection with the village square.</p>
1.3	medium priority	<p>In general, reduce street pavement for vehicles throughout the village center to the absolute minimum. Instead, add or widen sidewalks to encourage one-stop shopping and pedestrian use. Add neck-downs for extra pedestrian space or landscaping features, and to help slow traffic. Add parks, street furniture (benches, planters, bollards, balusters, chains), street trees and other amenities designed to please the eye, to add friendliness to the public space, and to encourage people to spend time walking and browsing in the village. Neck-downs, which are protrusions of sidewalk or landscaped areas into the travelled way, serve one or more of the following purposes: to widen pedestrian space, to better delineate travel lanes in the street, to mark the ends of rows of on-street parking space, to shorten the length of cross walks, or to provide less pavement width to vehicles which tends to reduce average speed. Clearly, when constructing such neck-downs the safety of vehicular traffic should not be compromised. However, the extra inconvenience of snow-plowing these areas seems to be a small price for the improved aesthetic appearance and pedestrian friendliness of the village center.</p>
1.4	medium priority	<p>When reconstructing the village streets, the design should give first priority to pedestrian convenience and comfort, while still maintaining the basic necessities for vehicular traffic.</p>

1.5	medium priority	To improve the village's function as a small neighborhood center and business district and to reduce reliance on the automobile, connect the village center with the neighborhoods surrounding South Acton Village by means of sidewalks, crosswalks and walkways, and where appropriate with bikeways.
1.6	low priority	Consider the institution of a village improvement district to raise funds, by special assessments and through impact fees, for village improvements.
1.7	high priority	Consider the site of the Civil Defense Building as a desirable component of the village square . The site would serve well with landscaping and street furniture. If it can be somewhat enlarged in the future, it could also accommodate a small street cafe, coffee shop or kiosk.
1.8	high priority	Encourage the construction of new buildings on the two vacant parcels at addresses 9-23 School Street. One of the parcels is owned by the Town. The buildings should be designed to be consistent with local historic district objectives, enhance the village character, and add to the vitality of the village. Buildings with store fronts along School Street, parking in the back, and apartments above would best suit these objectives. This location should not be used as a parking lot. While a parking lot is needed to address some of the parking problems in the village, in this location it would be contrary to the goals of this Plan. It would leave the gaping hole alongside the village street which at the moment severely distracts from the village character.
1.9	medium priority	Encourage higher residential density in and near the village center.
1.10	medium priority	Encourage the mix of residences and businesses in a single building.

1.11	high priority	<i>Adjust the zoning regulations to encourage land uses, and building and site designs, which enhance the village's appearance and function as a neighborhood center.</i>
1.12	medium priority	<i>Consider allowing Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) as a means to concentrate development in appropriate places within the village without increasing the overall development density in the village.</i>

**GOAL 2 PRESERVE, MAINTAIN AND RESTORE THE HISTORIC BUILDINGS
IN SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE.**

Issues:

Much of the special charm of South Acton Village comes from its abundance of old homes and other buildings. They stem from the Colonial to the Victorian periods when the village was a small but vital commercial and industrial settlement. Many factors have contributed to its economic decline, such as the independence of industry from water power and the decline of the rail roads. More recently, the severity of the waste water disposal problem, the lack of adequate vehicular parking and the overwhelming competition of suburban commercial sprawl and nearby larger commercial centers have taken their toll on the village.

To preserve the village's historic heritage, the Town of Acton has adopted the South Acton Local Historic District in much of the village. This district is intended to ensure that exterior improvements to buildings, structures and their settings, renovations, additions and new construction will be done a way that is consistent and compatible with the existing historic elements. However, during the many years of economic decline the village has experienced a deterioration and loss of many of its historic buildings. While some historic homes and buildings are maintained well, the village center in particular is overshadowed by buildings and structures that have fallen into disrepair, have lost historic architectural detail, or could soon be lost altogether, leaving little for historic preservation. These buildings, along with a widespread lack of property maintenance and care, detract from the historic sense and feel of the village and give it a "junky and run-down appearance", as was noted in several survey returns. A great deal more is needed, beyond the Historic District Designation, to preserve the historic resources of South Acton Village in the long term.

In addition to the obvious need for building maintenance and restoration, all village properties

and buildings must once again become viable places for people to live and work. Building owners, residents and business proprietors must be able to build the financial strength that enables them to restore, maintain and improve their historic properties.

Action Recommendations:

2.1	very high priority	<i>Find, pursue and install effective means of waste water treatment to serve the village center area. Without it, all other revitalization efforts may be in be vain.</i>
2.2	very high priority	<i>Encourage the renovation of Exchange Hall as a top priority.</i>
2.3	high priority	<i>Encourage the renovation of existing buildings.</i>
2.4	high priority	<i>Ensure that new buildings, structures, renovations and additions, including the planned bridge replacement and any improvements at the commuter rail station are situated, designed and built at a scale and with a design that is in harmony with the architecture of the existing historic buildings.</i>
2.5	medium priority	<i>Encourage historic preservation through education and increased use and exposure of the existing historic buildings and of the historic preservation organizations in Acton.</i>
2.6	high priority	<i>Enforce the historic district regulations.</i>
2.7	high priority	<i>Encourage small businesses, stores and service enterprises to occupy under-utilized floor space in historic buildings.</i>
2.8	low priority	<i>Seek historic preservation grants and other assistance to restore and maintain historic buildings.</i>

2.9

medium
priority

Expand the Historic District boundary further into the neighborhoods surrounding the village, to protect additional historic buildings, structures and their settings.

GOAL 3

CLEAN UP AND IMPROVE THE APPEARANCE OF BUILDINGS, STRUCTURES, YARDS AND PUBLIC SPACES IN SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE.

Issues:

A general lack of maintenance and care is apparent in many areas of South Acton Village. Litter and junk seem to collect at a particularly high rate. Historic and not so historic buildings are often neglected. The bridge in its present condition looks dilapidated. There is an abundance of disabled automobiles stored for parts or waiting for repair. Vacant lots have grown trash and weeds. All of these factors combined detract from what some see as a potentially quaint and beautiful village. Instead they create, as stated in some survey responses, "a run-down" appearance and "blight". In addition to the lack of sewers, this "image problem" is a major factor that deters businesses, customers and home buyers alike.

Often a little effort would go a long way toward improving the village's appearance and attractiveness. In other cases it will be a more substantial undertaking. Many of these efforts will rely on private initiatives, but the Town can assist this process by improving the public spaces in the village, by exerting regulatory demands when the opportunity arises for instance under site plan review, and by helping to seek grant and loan program funds that are geared toward historic preservation, housing rehabilitation and small business development.

Action Recommendations:

3.1

very
high
priority

Replace the Route 27 bridge across the rail road, which is not only unsafe but also ugly.

3.2

high
priority

Encourage the clean up and fix up of buildings and homes.

3.3

high
priority

Encourage the clean up and fix up of business properties and store fronts.

3.4	medium priority	Encourage the clean up and beautification of private yards.
3.5	high priority	Clean up vacant parcels and the areas alongside the rail road track; improve them with modest landscaping.
3.6	high priority	Define borders and edges by building fences, curbs or walls, or by planting bushes, trees and flower beds.
3.7	high priority	Screen automobile repair shops and their inevitable collection of cars with lines of bushes, trees, fences, gates or where possible even with new buildings. Some of the existing pavement areas would have to be removed to make room for landscaping.
3.8	high priority	Remove trash, junk, junk cars and litter; continue the tradition of regular neighborhood clean up days.
3.9	medium priority	Initiate an "adoption" program wherein individuals, businesses, civic or other groups can participate and assist in the beatification and regular clean up of South Acton Village.
3.10	high priority	Plant and care for grass, flowers, shrubs and trees where there are bare ground and weeds.
3.11	low priority	Remove, restore or replace old dilapidated signs.
3.12	medium priority	Seek business and resident sponsors for benches, flower containers, planting materials and their maintenance.
3.13	medium priority	Enforce the Town bylaw regulating the outdoor storage of unregistered motor vehicles.

SECTION 3.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

GOAL 4 **BUILD A SEWAGE COLLECTION SYSTEM AND TREATMENT FACILITY SERVING SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE AND ITS SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOODS TO ALLEVIATE THE SEVERE PROBLEM WITH SEPTIC SYSTEMS, AND TO HELP REVITALIZE THE VILLAGE AND CLEAN UP FORT POND BROOK.**

Issues:

Standard septic systems, as currently in use in South Acton Village, are not appropriate nor adequate, given the density of buildings and the unsuitable soil conditions in the area. Their failure rate is high. Replacement or new installation of septic systems is often extraordinarily expensive and of questionable life span, or simply impossible. This situation is a public health risk, pollutes Fort Pond Brook, depresses the South Acton Village real estate values, makes some properties unmarketable, and gradually reduces the variety of uses and the level of activities in the village. Without a remedy to this central issue the village area will fall further into decline, and blight conditions become a real prospect.

An adequate sewer collection and treatment facility serving South Acton Village is the most crucial element in redeveloping South Acton Village as a small business and neighborhood center. Town Meeting has approved earlier plans to include South Acton Village along with other surrounding areas (including Kelley's Corner) into a sewer collection system with a treatment plant on the Assabet River. Now, lack of federal and/or state funding assistance, and increasingly stringent water pollution control regulations, leave this project only as a remote possibility. However, another option has become available to serve - at least initially - the core of South Acton Village: A small treatment plant at Mill Corner, the new housing development behind the Exchange Hall. The Town also has +\$440,000 in gift monies that could be used to jump start a small sewer project. Any such option should be pursued, formalized and implemented with the greatest effort.

Action Recommendation:

4.1	very high priority	<i>Finalize and exercise the option offered to the Town on the common land of the new Mill Corner development as quickly as possible, and set up a sewer district for the South Acton village core area.</i>
4.2	very high priority	<i>Establish the capital cost for such a small system and encourage potential sewer district members to fund the project.</i>
4.3	very high priority	<i>Ensure that such a sewer district and system services a mixture of business and residential properties in the village center with appropriate and suitable allocations to stimulate small business development and address properties in most desperate need.</i>
4.4	very high priority	<i>Ensure that such a sewer district and system, at least initially, remains compact in area to maximize its benefit to the village center and to control cost. Expansions can be added later as technologies change, or if additional wastewater disposal areas are made available.</i>
4.5	high priority	<i>Explore possibilities for future system expansions or for separate systems to service all of South Acton Village as well as surrounding neighborhoods, for instance the construction of leaching fields on the Great Hill Conservation and Recreation Area. Seek necessary approval from the State Legislature.</i>
4.6	high priority	<i>Investigate and pursue new technologies in sewage treatment and press for fast and non-bureaucratic approval of appropriate technologies. Investigate the applicability of new State health regulations (Title V), effective since January 1995, which allow innovative methods of treatment under certain conditions, including the use of composting toilets.</i>
4.7	high priority	<i>Educate residents that Acton as a whole cannot be served by a single treatment plant due to the fact that the Assabet, Acton's only river that could accept waste water treatment plant discharge, is simply not large enough.</i>

4.8	high priority	<i>Promote the small sewer district for South Acton Village as a pilot project for future small systems throughout Acton, which might serve areas such as Kelley's Corner and other village areas.</i>
4.9	high priority	<i>Continue to monitor the availability of state and federal aid in building sewer systems (of any kind) in Acton, and aggressively pursue funding that may become available.</i>

GOAL 5 ENCOURAGE SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE.

Issues:

Many residents in the South Acton area would like to see a greater variety of stores and services in South Acton Village. They also want to preserve the village character and the existing historic resources. Preservation will not be possible without a healthy economic base and a supporting infrastructure. Residents do not wish suburban, large scale business development in the Village. They prefer small shops and businesses that would serve the surrounding neighborhoods, and might benefit from the already existing and inevitable through traffic and from commuter rail users. Residents are less enthusiastic about business development that would attract a lot more car traffic. However, too severe limitations on traffic generation could also stifle efforts toward revitalization. Successful small business development, along with the necessary infrastructure support, is a key to empower South Acton Village property owners to restore, maintain and beautify their places and buildings.

Action Recommendation:

5.1	very high priority	<i>Install a sewer collection and treatment system for the village center. This is the key, or prerequisite to the success of all other efforts.</i>
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5.2	medium priority	Build a parking lot behind Exchange Hall. This location is very much within the village center. But here, a parking lot will not distract from the village atmosphere. Effective screening will be necessary to protect nearby residences. In addition provisions must be made to prevent the use of the parking lot by commuters. Short term parking restrictions during the morning peak commuting hours should address this concern. General metering or charges for parking spaces should be avoided. Such measures do not mix well with efforts to support small businesses, which must compete with plenty of free business parking in the suburban strip malls.
5.3	medium priority	Improve parking availability and convenience. On-street parking, shared parking lots and driveway connections between parking lots are all means by which this recommendation can be implemented.
5.4	high priority	Adjust parking requirements of the Zoning Bylaw to better suit the village setting and to encourage shared parking arrangements.
5.5	medium priority	Conduct a market study to identify small businesses that could be viable in the village and what those businesses must do to compete successfully with other business locations.
5.6	medium priority	Design and carry out an economic development program for the village center.
5.7	medium priority	Attract one or two anchor businesses, for instance a restaurant or a book store/cafe in the Exchange Hall. This would generate name recognition and create an identity as a place of business for South Acton Village.
5.8	medium priority	Encourage small businesses, stores and service enterprises to locate in South Acton Village.

5.9	medium priority	<i>Focus on business redevelopment in existing under-utilized buildings and promote development on vacant lots within the village center.</i>
5.10	high priority	<i>Adjust use regulations in the Zoning Bylaw to encourage a greater variety of businesses and shops.</i>
5.11	medium priority	<i>Explore the potential of commuters and drive through traffic as a source of business customers.</i>
5.12	medium priority	<i>Encourage mixed use properties and buildings in the village center.</i>
5.13	high priority	<i>Encourage housing opportunities at a greater density within and near the village center.</i>

SECTION 4.

HOUSING

GOAL 6 PROMOTE A DIVERSITY OF HOUSING IN SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE AND ITS SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOODS.

Issues:

The existing rental housing available in South Acton Village represents some of the more affordable housing stock in Acton. Acton's deficit in affordable housing is still severe, in spite of the recent decline of real estate values. Housing within and near the village center at a higher density will help in the redevelopment of South Acton Village as neighborhood focus and business center.

Action Recommendations:

6.1	high priority	<i>Ensure the preservation of homes and rental units within and near the village center.</i>
6.2	high priority	<i>Within the village, protect and promote mixed residential/commercial buildings and multi-family dwellings with up to four units. Establish appropriate design control.</i>
6.3	high priority	<i>Provide a non-bureaucratic process for the conversion of large single family homes into owner occupied multifamily dwellings, and to allow mixed use properties.</i>
6.4	medium priority	<i>Provide greater zoning incentives for the inclusion of deed-restricted affordable housing units in the village center and in its surrounding neighborhoods.</i>

SECTION 5.

TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION

GOAL 7 **IMPROVE AND EXPAND THE SYSTEM OF SIDEWALKS, AND GENERALLY IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN SAFETY, CONVENIENCE AND COMFORT IN SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE AND ITS SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOODS. BUILD BIKE WAYS WHERE POSSIBLE.**

Issues:

Many residents in South Acton would like to walk or bike safely in their streets, and from their homes to the village or to the train station. On most streets, this is difficult, even dangerous or impossible, due to the lack of sidewalks or any other infrastructure for pedestrians and bicyclists. Existing sidewalks in the village lack connectivity, safety and friendliness. As a result, many avoid the village entirely. Others add to the traffic congestion by coming in with their cars, while complaining about the 'horrendous' traffic conditions.

The village does not, and probably never will, accommodate cars as easily as contemporary suburban shopping districts. The streets are narrow and limited in their right of way, room to accommodate parking spaces is limited, and all too drastic improvement of those limiting conditions would destroy the very charm of the village that so many seem to cherish. Therefore, it is fundamental to the redevelopment of South Acton Village as a neighborhood business center to allow residents from the surrounding neighborhoods to come into the village safely on foot or bicycle.

Action Recommendations:

7.1	high priority	<i>Build more sidewalks: on High Street, Central Street (continuation beyond Martin Street), School Street (continuation beyond Piper Road), both sides of Main Street in the village center and across the bridge, and east side of Main Street from the village center to the Discovery Museum. In the village center, sidewalks should be constructed with concrete and granite curbing. Elsewhere, asphalt and cape cod style berm would suffice.</i>
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7.2	medium priority	Build more sidewalks: on River Street, Piper Road, Prospect Street, Martin Street, Maple Street, Stow Street, and Liberty Street.
7.3	high priority	Improve pedestrian crossing safety, particularly on Main Street and School Street, through a pedestrian crossing signal at the intersection and through strict enforcement of pedestrian crossing laws.
7.4	high priority	Install wheelchair ramps at all pedestrian crossings and generally improve accessibility for the elderly and disabled persons.
7.5	low priority	Where construction of sidewalks must wait or cannot be accomplished easily, consider, as an interim measure and where possible, one-way traffic operation and the set aside of a marked pedestrian lane on the street pavement.
7.6	high priority	Maintain an annual sidewalk construction fund in the Town budget.
7.7	high priority	Rank the sidewalk construction schedule by neighborhood demand and initiative. Although safety is an important factor in determining where sidewalks should be placed first, the Town should not waste its efforts where the neighborhood is opposed or divided over sidewalks, particularly where extra right of way width or easements are needed. Maybe those will come into line at a later date.
7.8	medium priority	In connection with new development projects, require pedestrian links between the village and its surrounding neighborhoods. Consider development impact fees, density bonuses or other zoning incentives as appropriate to facilitate pedestrian connections.

7.9	high priority	<i>Provide direct pedestrian access to the train stop from Maple Street and Martin Street.</i>
7.10	high priority	<i>If possible, fix up the existing stairs by the Main Street bridge and the underpass from the stairs leading to the train stop. Ensure that the stairs remain in place when the bridge is reconstructed, and make the underpass accessible for the disabled from School Street if possible. This will require the cooperation of the Massachusetts Highway Department, which owns the bridge and the stairs, and the MBTA which owns the railroad right of way upon which the underpass is located. It may also be problematic to maintain the stairs, since they are not accessible for persons with disabilities.</i>
7.11	low priority	<i>Provide lighting for sidewalks, walk ways, and public parking lots.</i>
7.12	high priority	<i>Pursue the development of a bike way along the abandoned railroad right of way toward Maynard and alongside the active commuter line. In the course of the bridge replacement project, preserve the underpass of the abandoned rail road right of way under Main Street if possible, otherwise secure a bike way connection to Main Street or Maple Street.</i>
7.13	high priority	<i>Improve the appearance of store fronts.</i>

GOAL 8 IMPROVE AUTOMOBILE TRAFFIC SAFETY IN SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE.

Issues:

There is a severe sight distance problem over the existing bridge across the railroad. Multiple side streets cause congestion, and heavy Main Street traffic (over 19,000 vehicles per day in 1989) makes left turns in and out of side streets and driveways difficult. Generally, driving conditions are dangerous. With 14 accidents per year (1984-1987) the Main & School Streets intersection (the village square) is among the six highest accident locations in the Town of

Acton. Such conditions detract from small business development.

Traffic volume on Main Street will probably increase with time, a trend that can only be reversed by regional efforts to reduce the dependence on the automobile. In the meantime, the safety issues in the South Acton Village area must be addressed. It appears now certain that the Main Street bridge over the railroad tracks will be replaced in 1995. It is anticipated that this will improve sight distance on Main Street. The 1991 Master Plan recommends geometric improvements, subject to further detailed study. Along with the bridge replacement comes the reconstruction and signalization of the School Street intersection, which will improve both pedestrian and vehicular safety. These two projects have been on top of almost every resident's list of things that must be done. Other locations in South Acton Village and nearby do need improvement, but improvements in the village center seem to top the list of priorities.

Action Recommendations:

8.1	very high priority	<i>Interrupt the continuous flow of traffic on Main Street to allow safer turning in and out of side streets and driveways through a traffic signal at the School Street intersection with Main Street.</i>
8.2	very high priority	<i>Replace the Main Street bridge across the railroad before the existing bridge collapses, and to improve sight distance.</i>
8.3	high priority	<i>Improve safety and eliminate confusing traffic movements at the Main/Prospect Streets intersection.</i>
8.4	medium priority	<i>Provide geometric improvements and stop lines at the following intersections: Piper/School Streets; River/School Streets; Chadwick/School Streets; Chadwick/River Streets; River/Parker Streets; Liberty/Stow/Martin Streets; High/Conant Streets; Central/Main Streets. For the most part, these intersections have been named by residents participating in the planning process. But two of them have been carried over from the 1991 Master Plan because no obvious action has been taken since. Some of these small projects may need further study, but it appears that simply more obvious signage and pavement markings would provide greater safety and comfort to drivers.</i>

8.5	medium priority	<i>Operate one-way traffic where appropriate, for instance on River Street from School to Chadwick, or on Stow Street from Maple to Martin. These are changes that have been requested by residents living in those areas. Further study is required to determine the measures' feasibility. The South Acton Village Planning Committee has heard credible concerns that such measures would simply relocate traffic circulation problems to other neighborhoods, rather than bring about real improvements.</i>
8.6	medium priority	<i>Prohibit left turns from School Street into River Street, As long as River Street is two- way also prohibit right turns from River Street into School Street. These are changes that have been requested by residents living in those areas. Further study is required to determine the measures' feasibility. The South Acton Village Planning Committee has heard credible concerns that such measures would simply relocate traffic circulation problems to other neighborhoods, rather than bring about real improvements.</i>
8.7	high priority	<i>Enforce speed limits. Where appropriate, reduce the pavement width or create "neck downs" in the street to help reduce speed.</i>

**GOAL 9 MAINTAIN AND IMPROVE THE COMMUTER PARKING LOT AND
TRAIN SERVICES FOR ACTON RESIDENTS AND RESIDENTS OF
SURROUNDING TOWNS.**

Issue:

The South Acton commuter rail station is a very prominent feature in South Acton Village. The commuter rail is operated by the Massachusetts Bay Area Transit Authority (MBTA) and links Boston to Fitchburg. Many nearby residents have chosen to live in South Acton because of the presence of the train stop. Although the stop is at a different location today than the old train depot used to be, it is a South Acton Village tradition to have a train station. Most residents recognize the tremendous benefits of public transportation and appear happy and content with the presence of the train station even if they personally do not use it. However, the existence of

the commuter parking lot is a more divisive issue. It attracts many automobiles particularly during rush hour and some nearby residents feel imposed upon by the added traffic and congestion.

Opinions are split on whether to expand the parking facility. The parking lot is not only used by residents of Acton and nearby towns. People who live far to the west toward Fitchburg use the Acton parking lot as the first convenient location to switch onto the commuter rail, even though the Fitchburg trains stop at many more locations between Acton and Fitchburg. Three factors contribute to this commuting pattern: Not all trains travel to Fitchburg, many terminate in Acton; train service between Acton and Fitchburg is very slow due to the poor conditions of a single track between Acton and Ayer; at present there are no park & ride facilities along the Fitchburg line west of the South Acton commuter parking lot. A commuter parking facility in Littleton with access from Interstate 495 and Route 2 is in the early planning stages.

Action Recommendation:

9.1	high priority	Build a shelter and kiosk at the train station, including coffee shop/ convenience foods and newsstand.
9.2	high priority	Consider the rezoning of the commuter parking lot from Residence 2 (R-2) to South Acton Village (SAV), in order to facilitate a train station kiosk and possibly other services at the train station.
9.3	high priority	Lobby for MBTA commuter parking lots along the Fitchburg line west of Acton, primarily in Littleton at I-495, but also in Ayer, Shirley, Leominster and Fitchburg.
9.4	high priority	Lobby for double track improvements of the Fitchburg line west of Acton to high speed rail standards.
9.5	medium priority	Eliminate nonresident parking in the South Acton commuter lot and run shuttle buses to and from Maynard, Stow, Carlisle, Boxborough and other parts of Acton.

9.6

very
low
priority

As a last resort and long term future option, expand the parking capacity of the commuter lot, possibly by building a parking garage. However, this recommendation should be pursued only

- **after adequate park & ride facilities at all other train stops west of Acton have been constructed;**
- **after convenient shuttle buses to neighboring towns and more distant Acton locations have been placed into operation;**
- **after these facilities and services have reached full capacity; and**
- **if the resulting additional traffic can be accommodated safely and without altering the village character.**

Overwhelmingly, public response in South Acton indicated that there should be no further expansion of the commuter parking lot, including structured parking, until all other options are fully implemented and utilized.

SECTION 6.

NATURAL RESOURCES, OPEN SPACES AND RECREATION

GOAL 10 **PROTECT AND MAINTAIN EXISTING PUBLIC OPEN SPACES AND RECREATION FACILITIES. PROTECT AND MAINTAIN THE REMAINING FARM LAND IN SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE AND ITS SURROUNDING AREAS. DEVELOP MILL POND, FORT POND BROOK AND SURROUNDING LAND FOR ADDITIONAL PUBLIC OPEN SPACE AND PARK LAND.**

Issues:

The existing public lands, primarily the Great Hill Conservation Area, are highly valued by area residents. Many would like to see improved access to these lands and would like to improve their user friendliness. In addition, many feel that the banks of Fort Pond Brook and the shores of Mill Pond would be a valuable asset as public park land and access area to the water. Mill Pond and upper portions of Fort Pond Brook are relatively clean. Some people use it for fishing, canoeing and skating. Fort Pond Brook below Mill Pond is polluted primarily with raw sewage. While there are a few publicly owned parcels along the brook and the pond, it will require a major effort, financial or otherwise, to link them together into a continuous park or greenbelt. The acquisition of additional parcels located in the village center and along the brook may be a small but effective beginning. Recreation need not be limited to designated facilities or land areas. General improvements to foster pedestrian activities and bicycling will enhance the recreational and social value of public spaces in South Acton. Many residents also value the one remaining farm in South Acton and would like to see it continue as a farm. The farm land is zoned residential, with a density incentive for the inclusion of affordable housing and the concentration of the development in one area while leaving most of the rest open. Pro-active and creative planning that involves the farm's owner may well accommodate the farm preservation goal within a development for housing.

Action Recommendations:

10.1	very high priority	<i>Pursue the installation of a waste water collection system in South Acton Village to eliminate raw sewage discharge into Fort Pond Brook.</i>
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10.2	high priority	<i>Preserve the structural integrity of the Erikson Dam. It is the only reason why Mill Pond exists. The dam's collapse would eliminate Mill Pond as a scenic and recreational resource.</i>
10.3	high priority	<i>Improve sidewalks. Expand the network of sidewalks and walk ways, and generally improve the user friendliness of all public spaces in South Acton Village and its surroundings, for instance install lights, benches and bike racks.</i>
10.4	high priority	<i>Maintain existing conservation lands and recreation areas.</i>
10.5	low priority	<i>Improve access to existing conservation lands by installing tasteful directional signs to playgrounds and conservation areas, by improving the parking lot and trail access across from the Acton Shopping Center (Donelan's). This is an ongoing effort throughout the Town, which makes incremental progress each year.</i>
10.6	medium priority	<i>Improve user friendliness of existing conservation and recreation lands, for instance install benches and lighting at the skating pond.</i>
10.7	low priority	<i>Improve access to Mill Pond and Fort Pond Brook for non-motorized boats.</i>
10.8	medium priority	<i>Develop public parking spaces to facilitate access to Mill Pond, for instance near the corner of Maple Street and Stow Street.</i>
10.9	high priority	<i>Pursue a farm land preservation program for the Stonefield Farm off Martin Street, using the Massachusetts Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program, agricultural preservation zoning and/or other appropriate means. Seek cooperation with the owners of the farm.</i>

10.10	medium priority	<i>Pursue acquisition of small parcels within South Acton Village for public park purposes, such as the small portion of land between the Erikson Mill Dam and the rail road tracks east of Main Street, and the land of Lazaro Brothers paving off River Street, which is the site of the former Shoddy Mill and Dam.</i>
10.11	medium priority	<i>Pursue acquisition of Mill Pond and of additional land or public access easements along Mill Pond and Fort Pond Brook for purposes of a public park, open space, public access and the development of a continuous greenbelt along the brook.</i>
10.12	medium priority	<i>Encourage the cooperation of private land conservation groups and the Town of Acton in seeking assistance from the Massachusetts Department of Fisheries and Wildlife for land acquisition and access to the brook. The Department of Fisheries and Wildlife does help purchase land along rivers and streams for protection and public access.</i>
10.13	medium priority	<i>Encourage area residents to adopt trails or other portions for maintenance purposes (adopt-a-trail program).</i>
10.14	high priority	<i>Expand the annual South Acton clean up day to increase efforts to clean trash from Fort Pond Brook and its banks, or see if the scouts would take up this task as a community service project.</i>
10.15	low priority	<i>From a natural resources conservation viewpoint, evaluate the appropriateness of the current light industrial zoning designations of parcels of land near Parker Street, between River Street and the MBTA railroad tracks.</i>

PART II

IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM

Part II, the proposed Implementation Program, is presented in three sections. The Regulatory Program (Sect. 1) proposes initial changes to Acton's zoning bylaw. If adopted by Town Meeting, they would facilitate the goals of this Plan as new construction and redevelopment occur over time. The Capital Improvements Section (Sect. 2) lists recommended projects to repair or improve public infrastructure, to add new facilities and acquire land for public purposes. An estimated cost is shown for each item. The recommended Citizen Actions (Sect. 3) can be taken up by residents of South Acton Village and its surrounding neighborhoods and by South Acton businesses to further the Goals of this Plan.

SECTION 1.

REGULATORY PROGRAM

This South Acton Village Plan is a supplement to the town wide Acton Master Plan which was completed in 1991. The Master Plan had recommended the study of all of Acton's village areas in greater detail. The Village Planning Committee has developed a package of recommended changes to the Acton Zoning Bylaw to benefit South Acton Village and its immediate surroundings. The zoning recommendations are consistent with the goals and action recommendations of this Plan. They reflect extensive comments and suggestions from South Acton residents and businesses given to the Planning Committee through surveys and at public meetings. These zoning changes, if adopted, will begin the implementation of the South Acton Village Plan. *Part IV, Appendix A* contains the actual zoning articles as proposed.

The recommended zoning changes consist of a series of zoning articles. Town Meeting must adopt them with a 2/3 majority before they become effective as law. The articles will be presented at the 1995 Annual Town Meeting. The following paragraphs present a general overview of the recommended changes to the Acton Zoning Bylaw and their relationship to the stated goals of the South Acton Village Plan.

CHANGE OF SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE DISTRICT BOUNDARIES

The South Acton Village Planning Committee proposes to change the current outline of the South Acton Village zoning district (*Appendix A, Article 1*). *Figure II.1.1* shows the existing South Acton Village zoning district along with the other existing basic zoning districts in the Planning Area. It lies on the north side of the MBTA commuter rail line on both sides of Main Street. It extends on the west side of Main Street down Railroad Street and a short distance along Central Street to, but not including, the South Acton commuter parking lot. To the east of Main Street, the South Acton Village district follows both sides of School Street to River Street. From there, it extends a short distance on the north side of School Street and on the south side of River Street. To the east of the South Acton Village district, along the south side of River Street, follows a Light Industrial zoning district. It includes the 1902 Lothrop Factory (Flannery Mill) across from Chadwick Street. Next, there are several residentially zoned parcels, followed to the east by another isolated Light Industrial district near Parker Street. On the South Side of the MBTA line and on both sides of Main Street are two areas zoned General Industrial. A short distance to the west on Stow Street are three isolated parcels zoned Light Industrial. All other areas surrounding the South Acton Village zoning district are zoned for residential uses.

Figure II.1.2 shows the map of the proposed new boundaries of the basic zoning districts. It is

recommended to expand the South Acton Village district to include the various small industrially zoned areas that adjoin the current South Acton Village district to the east and south. The South Acton Village district area would be smaller along the north side of School Street. The isolated industrial zoning district currently located off Stow Street would change to a residential zoning designation.

The South Acton Village Planning Committee found that these changes, together with the other proposed zoning changes, will better help the planning goals: to improve the appearance of the South Acton Village area and to encourage small business development. The currently existing industrial districts, which immediately abut the current South Acton Village district, are for the most part in the heart of the village as well. The industrial zoning designation, which does not allow residential or general business uses, is incompatible with the village environment this Plan seeks to foster. Light manufacturing uses are currently allowed in the South Acton Village district subject to the discretionary review of a special permit granting authority. The mixed use character of the village zoning district would continue under the new and expanded South Acton Village district. Therefore, light manufacturing would continue to be an allowed use. However, only small facilities below five thousand square feet of floor space would be allowed to be consistent with the village scale and small business focus.

The Light Industrial district area along River Street and Fort Pond Brook to the 1902 Lothrop Factory located across from Chadwick Street would become part of the South Acton Village District. It contains a construction yard (Lazaro Paving), one house, and the 1902 Lothrop Factory which houses several industrial uses. The house and the construction yard are both legal, but nonconforming land uses under the existing Light Industrial district. Neither could be built or started there today. With a change to the South Acton Village district the house would become a conforming use, while the construction yard would remain nonconforming. Since it existed before the establishment of the current zoning district it can continue its operations. Following the proposed change of this area to the South Acton Village district, the construction yard may more easily give way to land uses that are more consistent with the planning goals, and more compatible with the residences across River Street and recreational uses along Fort Pond Brook (This Plan also recommends pursuing the acquisition of all or part of this property for park and open space purposes to expand the Fort Pond Brook open space corridor). At the same time, the range of uses allowed in the South Acton Village district would be much wider than in the Light Industrial District: light manufacturing, residential, retail and other business uses. Therefore, more options are available to reuse and rehabilitate the 1902 Lothrop Factory.

The General Industrial district area just south of the MBTA line would also become part of the South Acton Village District. It contains on the east side of Main Street the Erikson feed store, a legal but nonconforming use under the current General Industrial zoning, and a building used for legal and conforming light industrial purposes. With the change to South Acton Village zoning, both the feed store and the industrial uses would be legal and conforming uses. On the west side of Main Street it contains a building supply yard and a couple of vacant parcels. The

building supply yard would become a nonconforming use due to the proposed zoning change, but it may continue operation under legal grandfathering protection. The proposed change of this area to the South Acton Village district should encourage land uses that are more consistent with the village planning goals and more compatible with the nearby houses on Stow and Maple Streets.

The isolated Light Industrial zoning district area off Stow Street contains one house and an auto repair shop. Both are currently nonconforming uses in the Light Industrial district. The proposed change to a residential district will make the house conforming and leave the auto repair shop at its current nonconforming status.

Figures II.1.3 and II.1.4 show the existing Affordable Housing Overlay Zoning District and the existing Groundwater Protection Overlay District. These are existing zoning districts that overlay the basic zoning district map as shown in *Figure II.1.1*. Special regulations and development options apply in these overlay districts. *Figures II.1.3 and II.1.4* are shown here for completeness only. The proposed zoning district boundary changes as shown in *Figure II.1.2* will only change the outline of the basic districts, but will not affect the overlay districts.

SOUTH ACTON EXISTING ZONING MAP










FIGURE II.1.1

1994 TOWN OF ACTON PLANNING DEPARTMENT

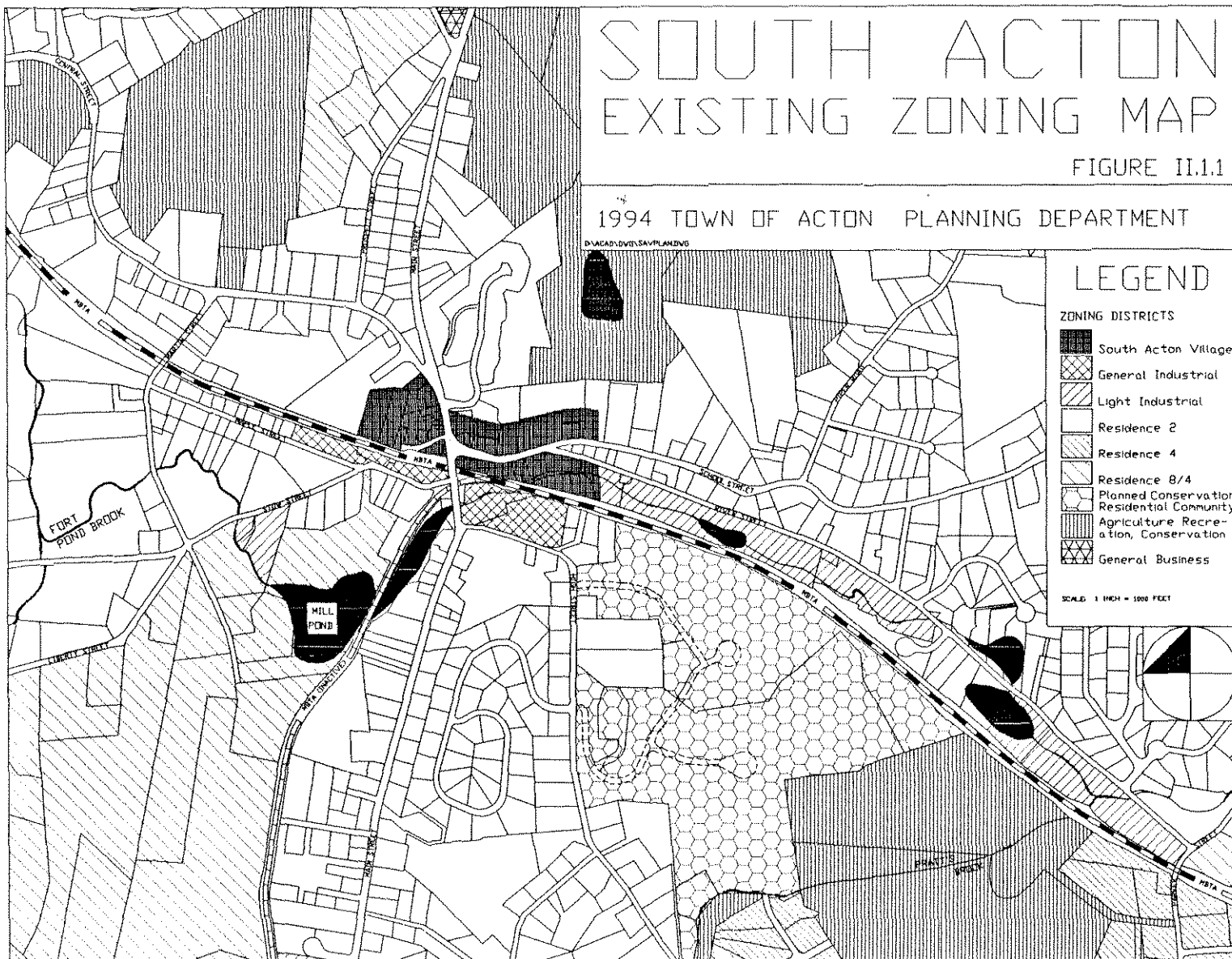
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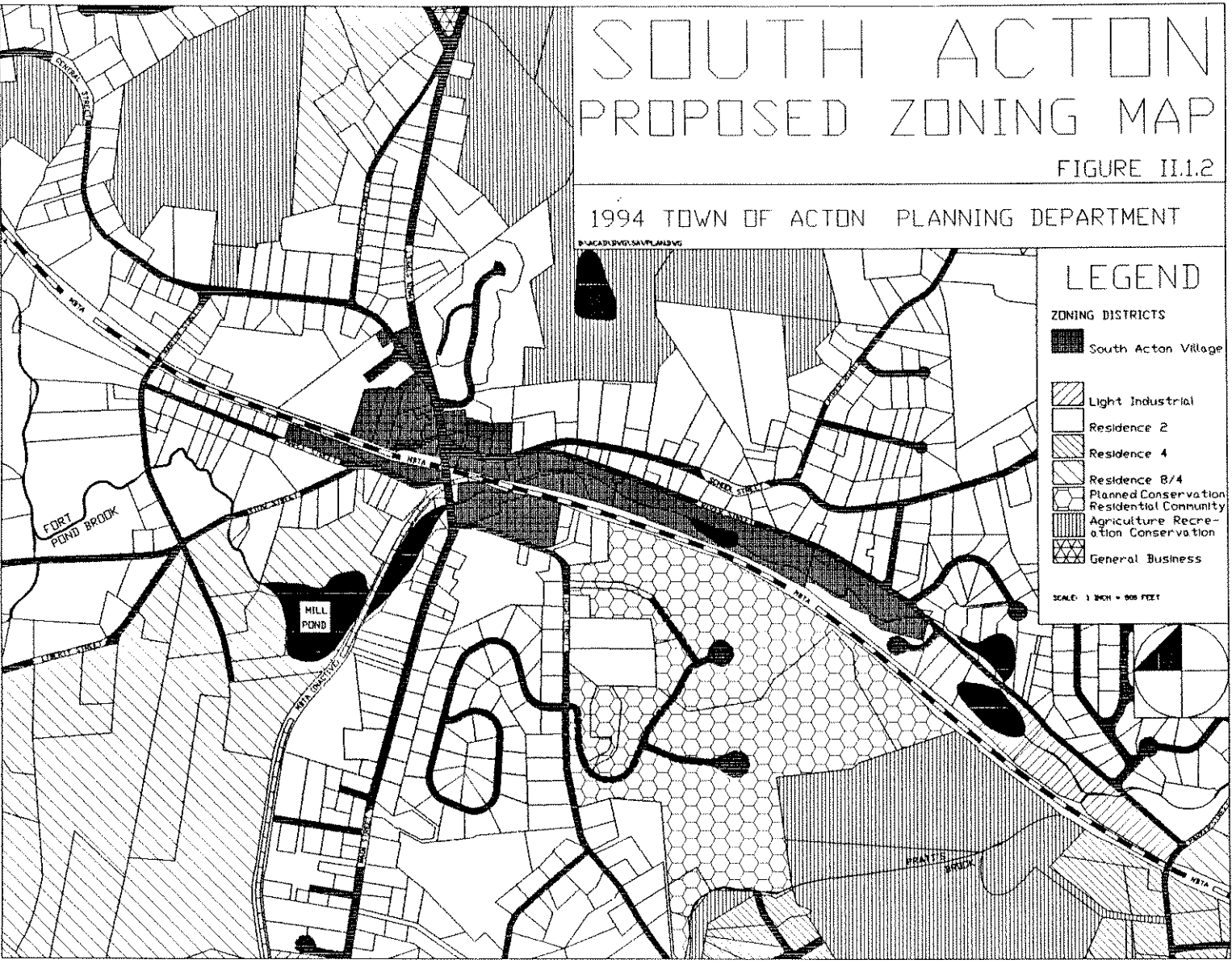
LEGEND

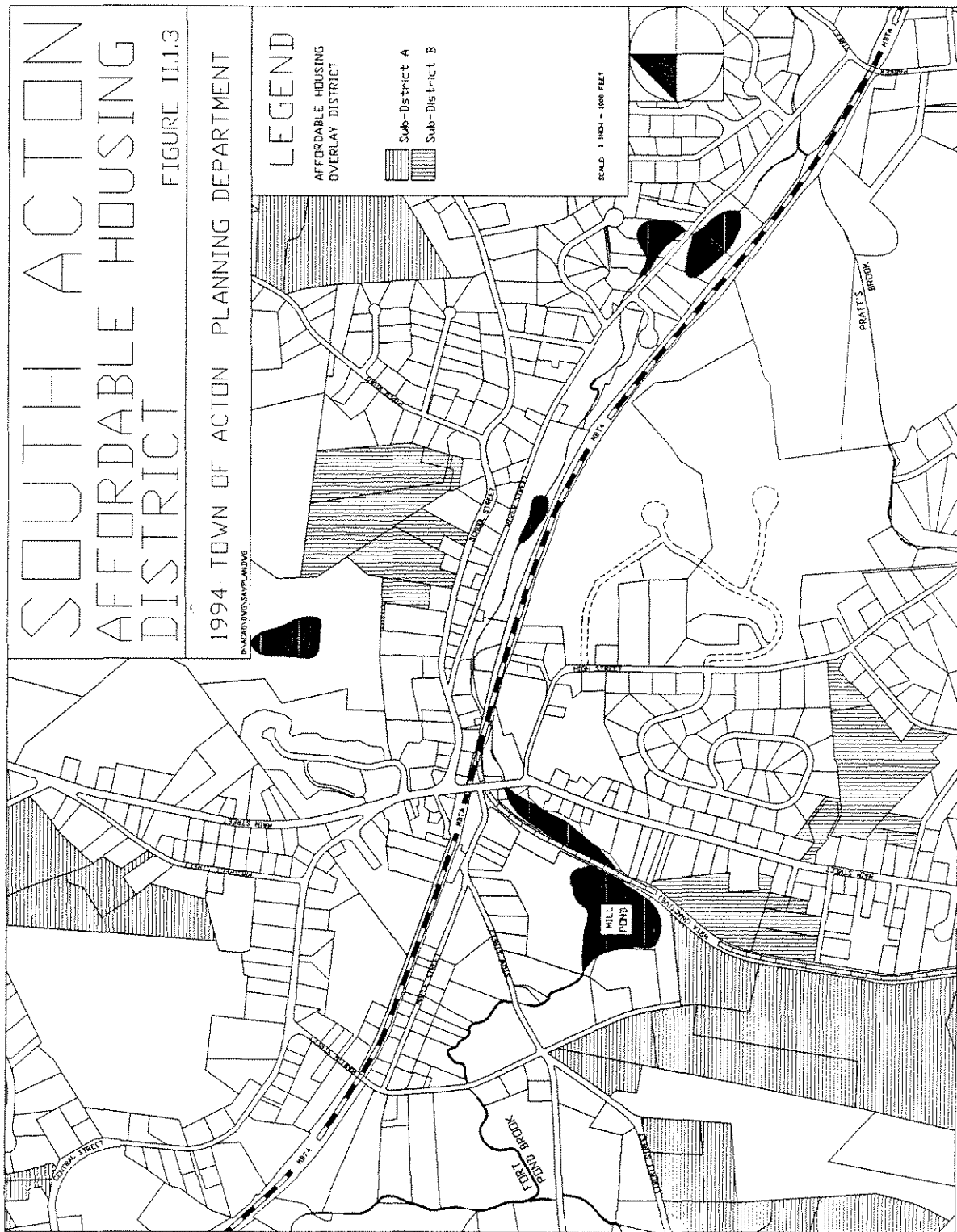
ZONING DISTRICTS

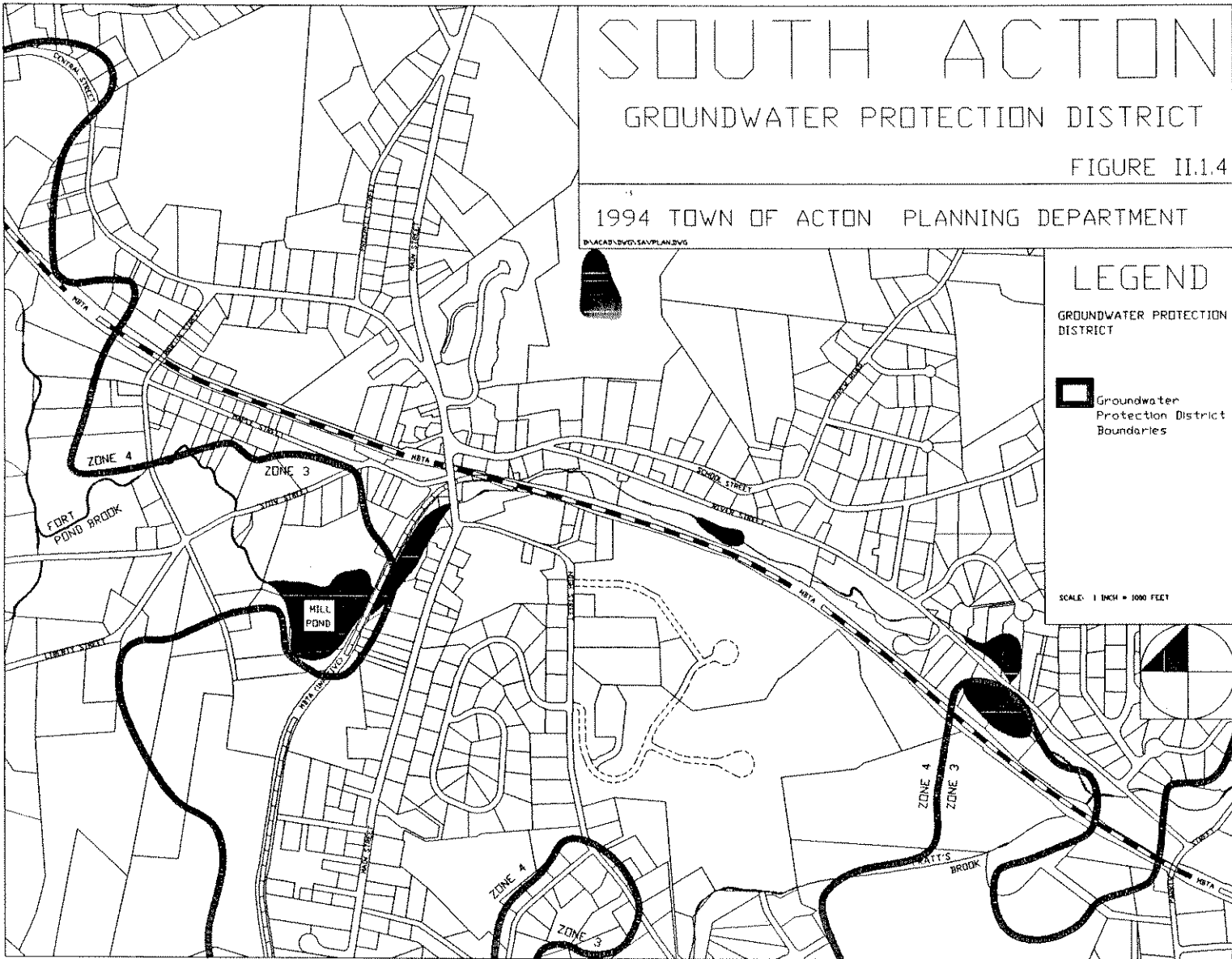
-  South Acton Village
-  General Industrial
-  Light Industrial
-  Residence 2
-  Residence 4
-  Residence B/4
-  Planned Conservation Residential Community
-  Agriculture Recreation, Conservation
-  General Business

SCALE: 1 INCH = 1000 FEET









CHANGE OF USE REGULATIONS IN THE SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE DISTRICT

The Acton Zoning Bylaw identifies 46 different types of land uses, which it regulates to varying degrees in different zoning districts. Land uses may be prohibited, regulated by special permit or allowed by right. In the South Acton Village District, allowed land uses are, for instance, single family residences (with accessory home business uses), various governmental, institutional and public service uses (such as a school, a church or a child care facility), retail stores, offices, and various service enterprises. A special permit is required for other land uses, such as a nursing home, a restaurant or light manufacturing. Consistent with the goals of this plan, the following specific changes in the land use regulations are recommended for the new South Acton Village zoning district (Appendix A, Article 2):

Earth removal would not be permitted except in connection with an approved site development. Currently, earth removal by itself is allowed, subject to a special permit.

Accessory apartments on lots smaller than 15,000 square feet and in older detached buildings would not require a special permit. Currently, a special permit is required for these situations; otherwise an accessory apartment is an allowed use.

New multi-family dwellings, and multi-family dwellings converted from single family dwellings, would be permitted by right with up to four dwelling units, provided the building's owner lives in one of the dwelling units. Currently, new multi-family construction is not allowed, and the conversion requires a special permit.

Businesses and dwellings would be allowed by right in the same building. Currently, this requires a special permit.

A lodge or a club facility such as those operated by the Elks, the American Legion or others, would require a special permit. Currently, this use is allowed by right although it is similar to that of a restaurant. A restaurant requires a special permit.

Veterinary care facilities and cinemas, theaters and performing art centers would be allowed by special permit, they are currently not allowed uses.

Gas stations, car wash operations, and privately operated parking facilities would not be allowed. Currently these uses are permitted by right or by special permit. Parking facilities associated with another permitted land use are not affected by this change.

These recommendations intend to promote a mixture of land uses that is more appropriate for a village setting. For instance, it is quite normal and fitting in a village to see small multi-family buildings, barns or carriage houses converted into apartments. On the other hand, gas stations and car wash facilities, particularly considering their typical package design, would detract from the village atmosphere. Site plan review for commercial and multi-family uses would be required above certain thresholds.

CHANGE OF DIMENSIONAL REGULATIONS IN THE SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE DISTRICT

Most of the current dimensional zoning requirements that apply in the South Acton Village district, such as for minimum lot size, maximum building size, minimum building setbacks or vehicular parking requirements mirror contemporary suburban residential and commercial zoning standards. These are ill suited for the South Acton Village area where, as opposed to contemporary suburban areas, many buildings are on small lots, closer together, larger relative to the lot they are on, and closer to the street. Development, rehabilitation and building additions according to these zoning standards are extremely difficult in any village setting. Where it is possible in South Acton Village, it would result in buildings that are inconsistent in scale and placement with the surrounding older buildings. New construction and site development would thus severely disrupt the existing village character. The proposed dimensional changes (Appendix A, Articles 3 and 4) would cure this problem:

The minimum lot area requirement of 10,000 square feet and the minimum open space requirement of 35% would be eliminated so that no specific requirements would exist for these two dimensions. This would result in greater flexibility to allow appropriately scaled new construction. The minimum lot area that would have to remain with a building or buildings would then be controlled by the size of the buildings, and vice versa, the size of buildings would be controlled by the available lot area. With the proposed limit on the building Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 0.40 (see below) a building's floor area could not be larger than 40% of the area of the lot on which it is located. For instance, an average house with a floor area of two thousand square feet would require a minimum lot area of five thousand square feet. On the other hand, a new building as large as the Exchange Hall (±10000 square feet) would require at least a 25,000 square foot lot, or slightly more than a one half acre. Similarly, reasonable open space on a lot would be ensured since a building or structure could not occupy more than 40% of the lot area.

The minimum frontage requirement of 100 feet and the minimum lot width requirement (width between the street frontage and the main building) of 50 feet would also be eliminated. These requirements also hinder rather than help new buildings to fit into the existing architectural fabric of the village. In addition, where several residential, commercial or mixed use buildings may be located on one lot like in the South Acton Village District, minimum frontage and lot width requirements (as well as minimum lot area requirements) have little purpose in controlling bulk and density.

The current minimum setback requirements for buildings from a side or rear lot line would be reduced from 30 feet to 10 feet. The current minimum setback requirements for buildings from a front lot line (that is the sideline of the street layout) would go from 30 feet to 10 feet, and a new maximum front setback of 20 feet is proposed. This arrangement will ensure a better continuum between new and old buildings, since most old buildings are close together and near to the street.

To encourage development more consistent with existing patterns of settlement in the village area and to allow some business growth to occur while ensuring a desirable mixture of residential and commercial land uses, the South Acton Village Planning Committee proposes to increase the maximum allowed Floor Area Ratio (FAR). FAR is a measure of the size of the building relative to the size of the lot on which it is located. The FAR would increase from its current limit of 0.20 (the building floor area may measure up to 20% of the developable lot area) to 0.40. However, at least half of the additional floor area over 0.20 must be used for residential purposes. This means that dwellings or mixed use buildings with at least one quarter of their floor space in residential use could be twice as large as purely commercial buildings.

Besides the building height limit of 36 feet, there would be a new minimum height of 20 feet for new principal buildings. This measure would prevent single story, flat roofed "strip mall" buildings or similar structures that are unsuitable in South Acton Village.

In addition it is proposed to reduce the requirements for the number of parking spaces that must be provided with each business to 70% of the requirement elsewhere, to modify the parking lot landscaping requirements to better fit the limited space available in a village setting, and to encourage the use of shared parking facilities. These changes would largely adopt the parking standards of West Acton Village to the South Acton Village District. Due to the proximity of buildings in the village the area could function much like a shopping center. Persons coming by car to South Acton Village to do business are better off to park their car once and complete all their errands on foot. In addition, on-street parking is available. The pedestrian accessibility of the village will greatly improve with the anticipated replacement of the Main Street Bridge and other improvements recommended in this plan.

The current regulations for the South Acton Village district already set certain size limits for individual business establishments. Consistent with the goals of this plan this prevents large scale business operations and focuses instead on small businesses more suitable in scale to the village setting. Currently retail stores, offices, banks, restaurants and building trade shops are limited 5,000 square feet in floor area, personal and general services, such as a barber shop or a laundromat, are limited to 3,000 square feet. The Village Planning Committee found that some of these limits are too generous and that other business operations should also be limited. It is proposed to limit retail stores, business offices, veterinary care facilities and banks to 3,000 square feet, light manufacturing operations and private lodge or club facilities to 5,000 square feet, and hotels to eight guest rooms. These are not limits on the building size but only on the size of individual business operations. Several businesses may occupy space inside one larger building.

ADDITIONAL SITE PLAN REVIEW THRESHOLDS AND CRITERIA

To better ensure that new development within the South Acton Village district will occur in a manner that is consistent with the South Acton Village character, the Village Planning Committee recommends reducing the site plan review threshold from 1,200 square feet of new construction to 500 square feet (*Appendix A, Article 5*). In South Acton Village, small projects and additions can have a tremendous impact. Following this change, every commercial, industrial or multi-family construction (new or addition, including pavement for parking spaces) will require a site plan special permit. In addition, the Committee recommends inserting a section into the zoning bylaw that will give the site plan special permit granting authority and the project applicant more guidance and direction about what kind and form of development is consistent with the existing village character.

ALLOW FOR PUBLIC PARKING FACILITY AND PUBLIC WASTE WATER TREATMENT FACILITY TO SERVE SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE

The recent development of 34 homes next to the village area, called Mill Corner, has raised the possibility of providing solutions to two long standing problems: waste water and parking. In approving the Mill Corner development, the Town agreed in concept with the developer to reserve land for the construction of a treatment plant, which could service a large part of South Acton Village, and to reserve land for a public parking facility. However, no formal option agreements have been executed, and neither option could be exercised unless the Town provides a cure for what would otherwise result in a zoning violation. Mill Corner has been approved as a Planned Conservation Residential Community. This zoning scheme requires that 60% of the development tract must be set aside as common land for conservation or recreation purposes. Septic leaching areas serving the development itself are allowed on this common land. However, the use of portions of this common land for waste water treatment and public parking to serve areas outside the Mill Corner Development is illegal under the current zoning bylaw.

Therefore, this plan recommends seizing the opportunity now by signing the option agreements and removing the zoning obstacle. As stated in other elements of this plan, it is the lack of adequate waste water treatment that most prominently inhibits the preservation and revitalization of South Acton Village. The lack of a suitable parking facility has also been identified for many years. Both are vital elements in the effort to turn around the slow decay and degradation of this village.

Two possibilities exist to achieve zoning compliance for both needed improvements to go forward. The first option would be to seek a Board of Appeals variance from the specific zoning requirements affecting this effort. Legal and policy review is necessary to see if this approach is feasible and desirable. The second option is to seek a zoning amendment at Town Meeting. (Appendix A, Article 6).

SECTION 2.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

The returns from the 1992 South Acton survey and discussions held at the 1992 public meeting point toward the need of improving existing public facilities and assets, and adding new capital or real estate assets to better serve the businesses and residents. Such improvements will help achieve the South Acton Village Plan goals. Some of the needed projects have been long standing issues, others may be listed here for the first time.

This section presents an inventory of the major projects which require substantial monies for their implementation. Each of the following projects is listed with a brief description; the reasons why it is recommended; the status of project planning and funding; a cost estimate; potential funding sources and funding mechanisms; and the Town board or agency, or the State agency that would be principally responsible to facilitate and oversee project implementation. Projects are listed alphabetically. Cost estimates assume that all work would be performed by private contractors. To the extent that engineering design and construction work can be handled "in house" by the Town of Acton work force, project costs could be reduced by one third to one half. Projects fall into the following categories of needs: bridges, pedestrian improvements, bikeways, public transportation, automobile traffic related improvements, sewage collection and treatment, parks and recreation. Some projects would address needs in more than one category.

In addition, this plan recommends in Part I, Action Plan, several measures that can be implemented at little or no cost, for instance wheelchair ramps, trail improvements or park benches. Other projects recommended in Part I such as improved tracks and park and ride facilities along the Fitchburg commuter line, shuttle buses to the South Acton commuter parking lot or longer distance bike ways, should be considered of regional or even statewide relevance. They must be addressed and financed at the appropriate level. Neither the "smaller" projects nor the regional projects are listed here.

1. BICYCLE LOCKERS AT COMMUTER RAIL STATION

Description

As a first installment this project would provide 20 bicycle lockers at the train stop in addition to the bike racks provided in accordance with the April 1991 commuter lot renovations plan (as of June 1994, work under the renovations plan is about 50% completed). Bike lockers are completely enclosed compartments, which may be locked to prevent vandalism.

Reasons for Project

To encourage the use of bicycles as a means of local transportation to and from the commuter rail stop. This would help relieve vehicular congestion of local roadways during peak commuting hours. The cost of one bike locker is lower than the cost of providing one automobile parking space, and it consumes much less space. More lockers beyond the initial 20 should be installed if demand justifies the investment. Lockers should be made available for a fee to offset the cost of purchase and maintenance.

Project Status

Conceptual.

Estimated Cost, Funding Source and Funding Mechanism

\$20,000 for 20 lockers. No funding secured. Potential funding sources are the Town of Acton, Federal Surface Transportation Enhancement or Transportation Demand Management Funds under the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA).

Board or Agency Responsible

Acton Planning Department for securing federal funding. Engineering Department for installation.

2. BICYCLE/PEDESTRIAN WAY FROM SOUTH ACTON TO MAYNARD, MILL POND ACCESS

Description

Conversion of the idle MBTA rail road spur leading from South Acton to Maynard into a paved bikeway and pedestrian walkway with access points to Mill Pond. Project would include restoration or replacement of the bridge that crosses Mill Pond at its narrow point. The bridge is an all timber construction on granite abutments and wooden posts. Also, the project would involve the removal of the old railroad tracks and ties. The way would be constructed 10-12 feet wide, to accommodate both bicyclists and pedestrians and to allow access for maintenance and emergency vehicles. In Acton, it would be approximately 1 mile long, and could connect with a planned bike route to Hudson and Marlborough.

Reasons for Project

The bike way would promote the use of bicycles as an alternative individual transportation mode to and from the South Acton commuter rail station, serving residents of South Acton and Maynard. With the increase in automobile traffic congestion and related environmental problems, it becomes increasingly important to provide convenient and safe means for non-motorized forms of transportation. Abandoned rail road right of ways, such as this MBTA spur, present an ideal opportunity to further this objective. The paved surface is recommended

because it is more suitable for bicycles, generally requires less maintenance and tends to last longer.

The bike way would also serve as a recreational resource for biking and walking and would improve formalized access to Mill Pond. Mill Pond is a water based recreational resource with exceptional scenic value. Formal public access to the pond's shores exists only from two Town owned parcels at 110 Main Street, across from High Street. Development of the bike and pedestrian way would greatly improve public access.

Project Status

Conceptual only. An attempt was made in the mid 1980's to securing Town of Acton ownership of the spur and to maintain continuity to at least the Maynard town line, but the effort was subsequently abandoned. In 1994, a regional group has formed to pursue the construction of the 'Assabet River Rail Trail'. It would follow mostly abandoned railroad beds from North Marlborough through Hudson, Stow, Maynard to the Acton Commuter Rail Station, and would follow the route in Acton as described above. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), the regional planning agency) is in support of funding a feasibility study for this project.

Issues and Recommendations

- MBTA ownership. Transfer of ownership to the Town or appropriate state agency, or right to use as a bikeway must be negotiated with the MBTA.
- Blockage. Lack of foresight and planning led to a zoning variance that resulted in the blockage of the right of way by the industrial building at 20 Main Street (formerly The Beacon). The bikeway will have to be routed through or around the facility, which requires negotiations with the owners and possibly other abutting land owners.
- It is unclear how much of the right of way in Maynard is still intact. Safe and convenient access to the Bikeway should be provided in Maynard. Even if the bikeway will end at the Maynard line, it will be an attractive and safer alternative to walking or bicycling on Main Street over a 1 mile distance.
- Route 27 underpass. The southerly bridge, which is currently slated for removal should be reconstructed instead, or replaced with a culvert suitable in height and width for bike traffic. This will allow bikeway access from the east side of Route 27, and maintain direct bikeway access to the train stop. In addition the east side of Route 27 has the potential to be developed as a small village park with access from Main Street. The underpass would maintain bike and pedestrian access from the west side of Main Street. This park would be located between the MBTA tracks and the Mill Pond Dam partially within the MBTA right of way and partially on land owned by Erikson's Grain Mill. Appropriate easements should be negotiated with Erikson's. The park could be included in the bikeway project at little or no additional cost. If the underpass cannot be

preserved, an adequate connection from the railroad bed to Main Street or Maple Street should be secured.

- The way would be used by bicyclists and pedestrians. Therefore, it must be constructed wide enough, and have proper sight distances, pavement markings and signage to ensure safety for all users.

Estimated Cost, Funding Source and Funding Mechanism

\$350,000 including repair or replacement of the Mill Pond bridge. However no land costs are assumed. No funding has been secured. Possible funding sources aside from the Town of Acton are Federal Surface Transportation Enhancement or Transportation Demand Management Funds under the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA).

Board or Agency Responsible

Acton Planning Department for securing funding. Acton Engineering Department for design. Massachusetts Highway Department for construction.

3. FORT POND BROOK GREEN WAY

Description

Acquisition of lands or easements along Fort Pond Brook to establish a continuous conservation corridor along the brook with public access and trails along the brook.

Reasons for Project

Acton's opportunities for water based recreation are very limited. There are few accessible ponds and no major rivers. The Fort Pond Brook Green way would greatly increase the value of the brook as a recreational resource. A green way for the entire length of Fort Pond Brook in Acton has been proposed by the Acton Conservation Commission and is a stated goal of the Open Space and Recreation Plan.

Project Status

In the planning area public lands along Fort Pond Brook are: the Mill Pond Park off Main Street, lands including Jones Field at the corner of Stow and Martin Streets. Limited access to the brook is possible at various street crossings.

Issues and Recommendations

- Land purchases are expensive. Easements should generally be preferred over land purchases.

- On the other hand much of the land along the brook is not developable and therefore has little market value due to its location in flood plains or wetlands.
- Depending on the individual circumstances, disposal of land or easements can result in reduced development potential. To the degree necessary, land use regulations should be adjusted so that owners who donate land or easements will not suffer any losses.
- Failing septic systems in South Acton severely pollute Fort Pond Brook. This pollution must be stopped. Otherwise the development of the green way downstream from the village would be undesirable.

Estimated Cost, Funding Source and Funding Mechanism

No estimate. It is recommended to pursue easements with land owners. In addition to Town funds, funds may be available from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management under an Open Space Bond bill, subject to appropriation.

Board or Agency Responsible

Department of Municipal Properties. Conservation Commission.

4. CENTRAL PARKING

Description

Central parking lot on land behind Exchange Hall where the Town has recently been offered a no cost option on land. The land would support approximately 40 parking spaces with vehicular access from Nylander Way.

Reasons for Project

There is a serious lack of parking spaces to serve village businesses and other functions such as church services or cultural events. There are only a few on-street parking spaces, and the 36-car lot behind the South Acton fire station is rather distant from the village center. Given the village setting it would make little sense to cure this problem by providing more parking spaces on individual business properties. In South Acton Village, business uses are close enough together to be accessible by foot from a central parking location. This would best address the average parking need.

Project Status

Project is in the conceptual stage. No planning or design has been performed.

Issues and Recommendations

- The Town should execute an option agreement for the acquisition of the land for this purpose at no cost.
- The Town, by Town Meeting vote or through a zoning variance, must first cure a zoning prohibition which currently would not allow general purpose public parking in the identified location.
- Second, the Town should proceed with the acquisition of the land in question or otherwise secure its future use for vehicular parking purposes.
- Related to this project are the following three measures to further improve parking availability in South Acton Village, which can be implemented at little or no cost:
South Acton businesses should formalize shared parking arrangements where possible;
Illuminate the parking lot behind the South Acton fire station during evening hours;
Allow free weekend parking on commuter parking lot for persons attending church services or cultural events at the Congregational Church or the Exchange Hall.

Estimated Cost, Funding Source and Funding Mechanism

\$60,000 for a 40 space parking lot with access drive to Nylander Way. No monies have been earmarked for this project at this time. Potential funding sources are funds appropriated at Town Meeting, voluntary contributions from businesses and institutions that might benefit from the parking lot, funds raised through impact or betterment fees, federal funds under the Massachusetts Small Cities Program (CDBG), or State funds under the Community Development Action Grants (CDAG) program.

Board or Agency Responsible

Acton Planning Department for preliminary work related to the resolution of zoning issues, land acquisition, setting up funding mechanisms and preparing grant applications as appropriate.
Acton Engineering Department for engineering design and construction supervision.

5. ROUTE 27 (MAIN STREET) BRIDGES

Description

The two bridges lead Route 27 across the MBTA railroad tracks in the village center between School Street and High Street. They are two-lane bridges with a sidewalks on both sides. In the bridge location, Route 27 carries 15,000 to 19,000 vehicles per day. The 80-89 foot northerly bridge crosses the double track bed of the Fitchburg MBTA line which has frequent commuter rail traffic. It is a 1906 pony truss bridge on granite block abutments with steel trusses arching over the wooden deck. The northerly abutment supports stairs leading from the Main Street level to the rail bed. The stairs allow for pedestrian access to the train stop

without the need to cross heavily travelled Main Street. The 35 foot southerly bridge crosses a single track spur to Maynard which is no longer in operation. It was built in 1906 along with the northerly bridge. It is constructed with single span timber stringers on granite block abutments. Both bridges have been identified as in need of replacement at least since 1981. Under current plans, only the northerly bridge would be reconstructed and the southerly bridge would be eliminated. A third bridge just to the south crosses Fort Pond Brook. This old masonry arch is in good condition and it should be preserved.

Reasons for Project

The load limit is 6 tons which is inadequate for larger trucks, including Acton fire apparatus. The condition of the bridge is deteriorating over the years. The bridge is generally in poor condition and contributes to a sense of visual blight in the South Acton Village area.

Project Status

The bridge project, together with the reconstruction project of the School Street intersection with Main Street is scheduled for work to begin in 1995.

Issues and Recommendations

- Until construction actually begins, the design progress should be closely monitored by the Town to ensure timeliness and appropriateness of the design.
- The elimination of the southerly bridge reduces project cost but would eliminate desired access to the spur from the east side of Route 27. As is generally the case with abandoned rail road right of ways, the spur should not be obstructed to maintain its potential use as a bike way. In addition, the spur provides potential public access to Mill Pond. If the southerly bridge cannot be replaced, an adequate connection from the railroad bed to Main Street or Maple Street should be secured.
- The replacement bridge(s), like the existing bridges, should have sidewalks on both sides.
- The northerly bridge should have sufficient track clearance to allow placement of utility lines (including sewers) into the bridge deck.
- The stairs on the north abutment should be preserved and repaired, and the pedestrian underpass from the stairs to the train stop should be constructed more formally as a pedestrian way. Access to the underpass for persons with disabilities should be provided from Main or School Street. This access could replace the stairs if they cannot be reconstructed.
- The bridges are located within the South Acton Local Historic District. Design of the

replacement bridge(s) must be compatible with historic district objectives.

Estimated Cost, Funding Source and Funding Mechanism

Current State estimates show a cost figure of \$1,200,000. The State of Massachusetts is owner of the bridge. Project funding would come from the Federal Bridge Replacement and Rehabilitation Program as authorized under the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) or such other funds as determined by the State.

Board or Agency Responsible

Massachusetts Highway Department, District 3, Worcester for funding allocation, design and construction.

Acton Engineering Department is local liaison.

6. ROUTE 27 (MAIN STREET) INTERSECTION WITH SCHOOL STREET

Description

This project would reconstruct the School Street intersection with Main Street, including some changes of the Main Street grades and side street approaches in order to blend with the new bridge deck. The work would be done concurrently with the bridge replacement. Traffic signals would also be installed as part of the project.

Reasons for Project

Especially left turns out of side streets are extremely difficult during peak hours. Left turns from Main Street onto side streets tend to cause backups on Main Street due to insufficient pavement width. Exiting School Street and High Street, sight distance over the Route 27 (Main Street) bridge is extremely short. The Main Street intersection with School Street is the center of the village (also know as Quimby Square). South Acton Village is in need of revitalization. One of the key elements in revitalizing the village center is to create a village square and encourage foot traffic. The need exists for ample room for pedestrians.

Issues and Recommendations

- The area is within or immediately adjacent to the South Acton Local Historic District. Construction design must be compatible with historic preservation objectives.
- The reconstruction design should provide much additional room for pedestrian uses, particularly in front of Exchange Hall. Curb radii should be kept at a minimum. This would facilitate the creation of a village square at the intersection.

Project Status

The project is scheduled for 1995 in conjunction with the bridge replacement.

Estimated Cost, Funding Source and Funding Mechanism

Current State estimates show a cost figure of \$1,000,000. Project funding would come from one of the Federal Surface Transportation funding categories as authorized under the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA, or such other funds as determined by the State.

Board or Agency Responsible

Massachusetts Highway Department for construction funding and project implementation.
Acton Engineering Department for project design and as local project liaison.

7. SEWER COLLECTION AND TREATMENT

Description

Project Alternative 1:

Larger sewer collection system serving South Acton, surrounding neighborhoods and Kelley's Corner; almost 3 miles of sewer mains to new treatment plant (or existing Maynard plant) located on Assabet River. Level of treatment in new plant would be tertiary (nitrate removal), which is the most advanced method of sewage treatment currently available and approved by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. Effluent discharge would be to the Assabet River.

Project Alternative 2:

Smaller, very localized sewer collection system serving not more than 40 locations in South Acton Village. Treatment plant would be located in the village behind Exchange Hall. Plant would provide tertiary level of treatment. Effluent would be in the ground. Potential for future expansion is uncertain, but may exist subject to locating additional leaching areas, availability of new treatment technologies, or future state regulatory changes.

Reasons for Project

The South Acton Village area has a large number of failed, failing or inadequate septic systems and cess pools serving individual land uses. Effluent break out and under ground movement causes downstream pollution of Fort Pond Brook. Due to small lot sizes and difficult soil conditions, individual system replacements are often impossible. This situation severely affects property values and contributes to a general decline of the area. A sewer collection and treatment system for South Acton Village is essential in stopping the decline and giving the area a chance for revitalization.

Project Status

Project Alternative 1:

Design plans completed. Construction has not begun.

Project Alternative 2:

Feasibility study completed. No design plans to date.

Estimated Cost, Funding Source and Funding Mechanism

The Town of Acton is holding approximately \$140,000 in a gifts accounts (Great Hill gift) which were donated for South Acton improvements. The Town anticipates an additional \$300,000 gift (Mill Corner gift) upon completion and sale of the last four dwelling units in the Mill Corner development. While these monies may be applied to any improvement project in South Acton Village, its application toward a sewer project has been widely discussed.

Project Alternative 1:

Estimated Cost is \$10,000,000. In 1986 Town Meeting authorized to spend \$3,000,000 for this project. This vote was taken in anticipation of reimbursements by the State and federal grant monies available at that time. Shortly thereafter, federal sewer grant programs were discontinued, and the state reimbursement program was converted into a loan program. Today, the overall project cost exceeds cost limits under potentially available grant programs such as the Small Cities Program (CDBG, federal) or the CDAG (Community Development Action Grants, State). Today there are two major funding options which may be used individually or together:

1) A special sewer district whereby the sewer facilities may be financed through revenue bonds which would then be retired by user charges from within the district. Since these charges would be in addition to annual service fees, and because the number of users served is small relative to the project costs that must be bonded, serving these debts may exceed the financial resources of property owners in the sewer district. The cost to individual owners may be reduced by

2) a general obligation bond issued by the Town which would be serviced from general tax revenues.

The anticipated \$440,000 in gift monies could be used to reduce the cost of bonding.

Project Alternative 2:

Estimated Cost is \$900,000. No firm plan for funding this project has been set forth to date.

Potential funding sources are: Anticipated \$440,000 in gift monies. Also, the smaller cost falls within the range were the project would qualify for available grant programs such as the Small Cities Program (CDBG, federal) or the CDAG (Community Development Action Grants, State). After grant options have been exhausted and anticipated gift monies have been allocated, the remaining capital cost could be covered with a special sewer district whereby the sewer facilities may be financed through a municipal revenue bond. A revenue bond, whose term may be as long as 30 years, would then be retired through annual or monthly payments by the

facility's users. Generally, municipal bonds are cheaper than loans or mortgages for individuals or businesses. Without grant monies the estimated capital cost per household would be \$11,000 to \$13,000. Annual charges to service the bond on these capital costs would be in addition to an annual \$400 to \$500 per household fee for operation and maintenance. The ratio between the number of users served and the project cost that must be bonded is more favorable if the \$440,000 of gift monies are applied to the project. Bonding costs would be reduced further if the Town manages to receive grant monies.

Issues and Recommendations

- Project Alternative 1 is very expensive relative to the service area and depends on three factors which are largely out of the Town's control.
 - 1) The placement of a new treatment plant on the Assabet is becoming less likely as environmental regulations become more stringent. A more advanced tertiary level of treatment would increase the estimated project cost but may stand a better chance.
 - 2) A tie in to the Maynard treatment plant has been considered and negotiations between Acton and Maynard have taken place, but so far without tangible results. An Acton tie into the Maynard plant would require an upgrade of the Maynard plant.
 - 3) At present and in the foreseeable future, no federal or state grant programs exists which might fund a multi-million dollar sewer project. The maximum amount for which Acton might qualify in a competitive funding round for federal grants is \$800,000 (Community Development Block Grants - Massachusetts Small Cities Program).
- Project Alternative 2 with a total estimated cost of \$900,000 appears more feasible from a funding perspective and is less dependent on factors that are beyond the Town's control. Therefore, this option should be pursued vigorously.
- For Project Alternative 2, the Town must first execute options for the no cost acquisition of the land for this purpose. Also, the Town, by Town Meeting vote or through a zoning variance, must first cure a zoning prohibition which applies to the land where the sewage treatment plant would be located. Currently zoning would not allow use of the land for the desired purpose.
- For Project Alternative 2, the Town should quickly proceed with the acquisition of the land in question.

Board or Agency Responsible

Acton Board of Health and Acton Health Department.

8. SIDEWALKS

Description

New Construction and rehabilitation of sidewalks within the village center and along roadways that connect the village center with surrounding neighborhoods. In the village center, sidewalks would be constructed with concrete and granite curbs, otherwise asphalt and cape cod berm would be used.

Reasons for Project

Automobile traffic is very high along most roadways. These roads are narrow and pedestrians are not safe in the automobile travel lanes. To help implement several of the stated goals of this plan pedestrians access to the village from the surrounding neighborhoods must be created, and pedestrian facilities in the village center must be improved and expanded to create a climate and street environment in which people feel comfortable to walk, browse, shop and communicate.

Project Status

Conceptual. Last major sidewalk construction occurred in two phases between 1987 and 1991 on the north side of School Street between Main Street and Piper Road. No additional detailed plans are ready at this time.

Estimated Cost, Funding Source and Funding Mechanism

\$28 per linear foot for asphalt sidewalks with Cape Cod berm.

\$45 per linear foot for concrete sidewalks with granite curb.

\$100 per linear foot where retaining walls are required.

These costs have been estimated by the Acton Engineering Department. They are averages and do not include any costs for land or easements.

Funding would be from general Town revenues as appropriated by Town Meeting. In addition partial funding may be available from Federal Surface Transportation Enhancement or Transportation Demand Management Funds under the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA).

Issues and Recommendations

The layout of streets is sometimes too narrow or irregular to easily fit a sidewalk next to the roadway. In such instances easements from abutting landowners are necessary. In other cases easements may be desirable to preserve large trees. Sidewalks should be constructed first where support and cooperation from abutting land owners is assured.

Board or Agency Responsible

Engineering Department for design and engineering plans. Planning Department for seeking outside funding sources.

Individual Sidewalk Projects

- High Street for its entire length from Main Street to Route 62 at an estimated cost of \$270,000. As a first phase, the section from Main Street to Audubon Drive on north and east side of High Street should be targeted. This first segment may require easements from abutting land owners. Its length is approximately 1300 feet. The terrain is difficult and retaining walls may be required in some locations. Construction should be with concrete and granite curbing from Main Street to the bend, from there to Audubon Drive with asphalt and Cape Cod berm. Estimated cost: \$60,000.
- Jones Field sidewalk connections from Main Street via Maple Street (east end) and Stow Streets, and from Central Street via Martin Street. Easements from abutting land owners will be required. Some work will be in wetlands and retaining walls may be required there. The length of both sidewalk connections is approximately 1900 feet each. Construction should be with concrete and granite curbing along the Maple Street Segment close to the village center, the rest should be with asphalt and Cape Cod berm. Estimated cost: \$150,000.
- Main Street on easterly side from School Street to approximately 300 feet north of Nylander Way, with crosswalk to west side of Main Street at northerly end. Total length is approximately 400 feet; terrain is difficult; retaining wall is required; construction should be with concrete and granite curbing. Estimated cost: \$40,000.
- Prospect Street on one side from Central Street to Main Street. May require easements from abutting land owners, particularly at the north end. Total length is approximately 1,600 feet; terrain is standard; construction should be with asphalt and Cape Cod berm. Estimated cost: \$45,000.
- River Street from School Street to Parker Street. This is probably the most difficult street segment to construct a sidewalk. If the recommendation for one-way traffic between School and Chadwick Street is implemented, the width of the vehicular travel way could be reduced to make room for the sidewalk. From Chadwick Street to Parker Street, easements, work in wetlands, and retaining walls will be necessary at numerous locations. Construction should be with asphalt and Cape Cod berm. The overall length is approximately 5000 feet. Estimated cost: \$210,000.
- School Street from Piper Road to Laws Brook Road, and Laws Brook Road for its entire length to the Concord town line where it would connect with the existing sidewalk that least to West Concord Center. Total estimated cost would be \$210,000. As a first phase the section from Piper Road to Parker Street should be targeted. This first segment may require easements from abutting land owners at several locations. Its length is approximately 6,000 feet; the terrain is difficult in some locations; retaining

walls may be required in spots; construction should be with asphalt and Cape Cod berm. Estimated cost: \$150,000.

- School Street - sidewalk reconstruction on south side between Main Street and River Street, with wheelchair ramp and crosswalk at River Street to the north side of School Street. The existing sidewalk is in poor condition and in some places has been more or less absorbed by the street. Reconstruction should be with concrete and granite curbing. Length approximately 600 feet. Estimated cost: \$30,000.
- In the long term additional sidewalks should be constructed along Central Street from Martin Street to West Acton Village, Piper Road, Stow Street west of Martin Street, and Liberty Street.

SECTION 3.

CITIZEN ACTIONS

Legislative action to change zoning standards in South Acton Village can yield long term benefits and municipal capital improvement efforts can stimulate growth and revitalization. However, none of these efforts will produce the desired results unless residents and businesses in and surrounding the village assume ownership of this plan, keep it alive, and set out to accomplish its goals. Many recommendations of the plan call for private initiative. Actions taken by residents and businesses in South Acton Village are:

- Continue annual cleanup day.
- Volunteer for the benefit of South Acton by getting involved in one or more of the following organizations:
 - The South Acton Revitalization Committee.
 - The South Acton Improvement Association.
 - The Iron Work Farm.
- Set up a South Acton Village Business association.
- Increase publicity and news coverage on South Acton issues and events.
- Organize and offer historic discovery tours through South Acton. Sponsors and organizers would best be the Acton Discovery Museum and the Ironwork Farm.
- Maintain regular contact with Town officials to monitor and promote the implementation of this plan.
- Renovate existing buildings.
- Clean up and fix up buildings, homes, business properties, store fronts and yards.
- Plant and care for grass, flowers, shrubs and trees.
- Screen automobile repair shop parking areas from public view.
- Initiate an adoption program for persons, businesses, civic organizations or other groups to promote specific improvement projects.
- Enlist the help of the Acton Garden Club.
- Seek business and resident sponsors for benches, flower containers, planting materials and their maintenance.
- Share parking spaces with neighboring businesses.
- Adopt trails on the conservation land in order to maintain them.

PART III

INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

In preparing the goals and recommendations of the South Acton Village Plan, the committee listened as much to resident's input from surveys and the public meetings, as it paid attention to the existing realities and conditions which shape South Acton today. Part III provides the supporting documentation and descriptions of the existing conditions. It is organized in ten sections and provides information on existing land uses, gives general impressions of the village, describes historic background and facts, natural resources and constraints, recreational and economic resources and some demographic findings. In addition, the potential maximum development intensities, or build-out conditions, are estimated assuming existing and proposed zoning regulations. The last section estimates the effect of build out conditions on overall property valuations in the planning area.

SECTION 1

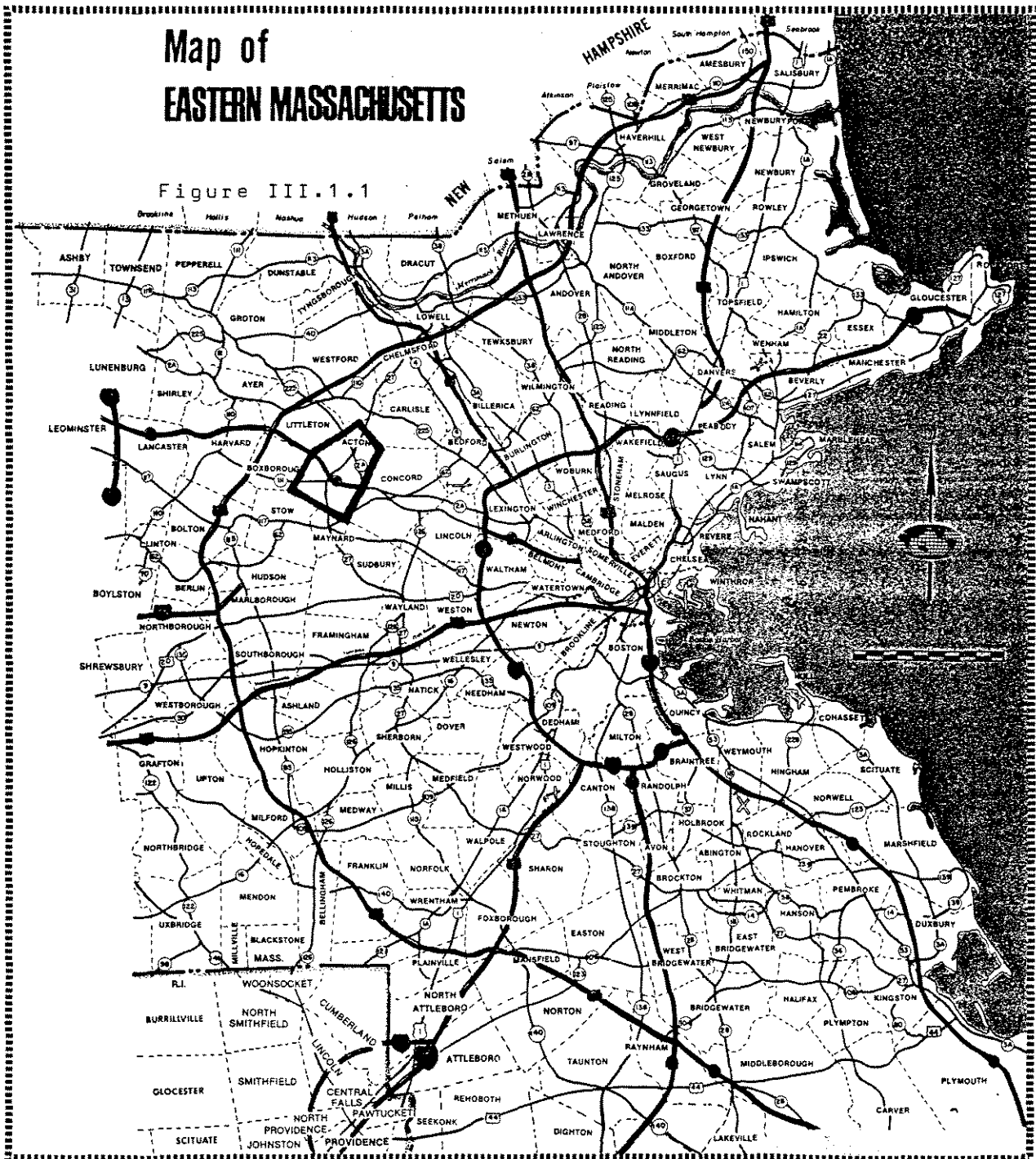
GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

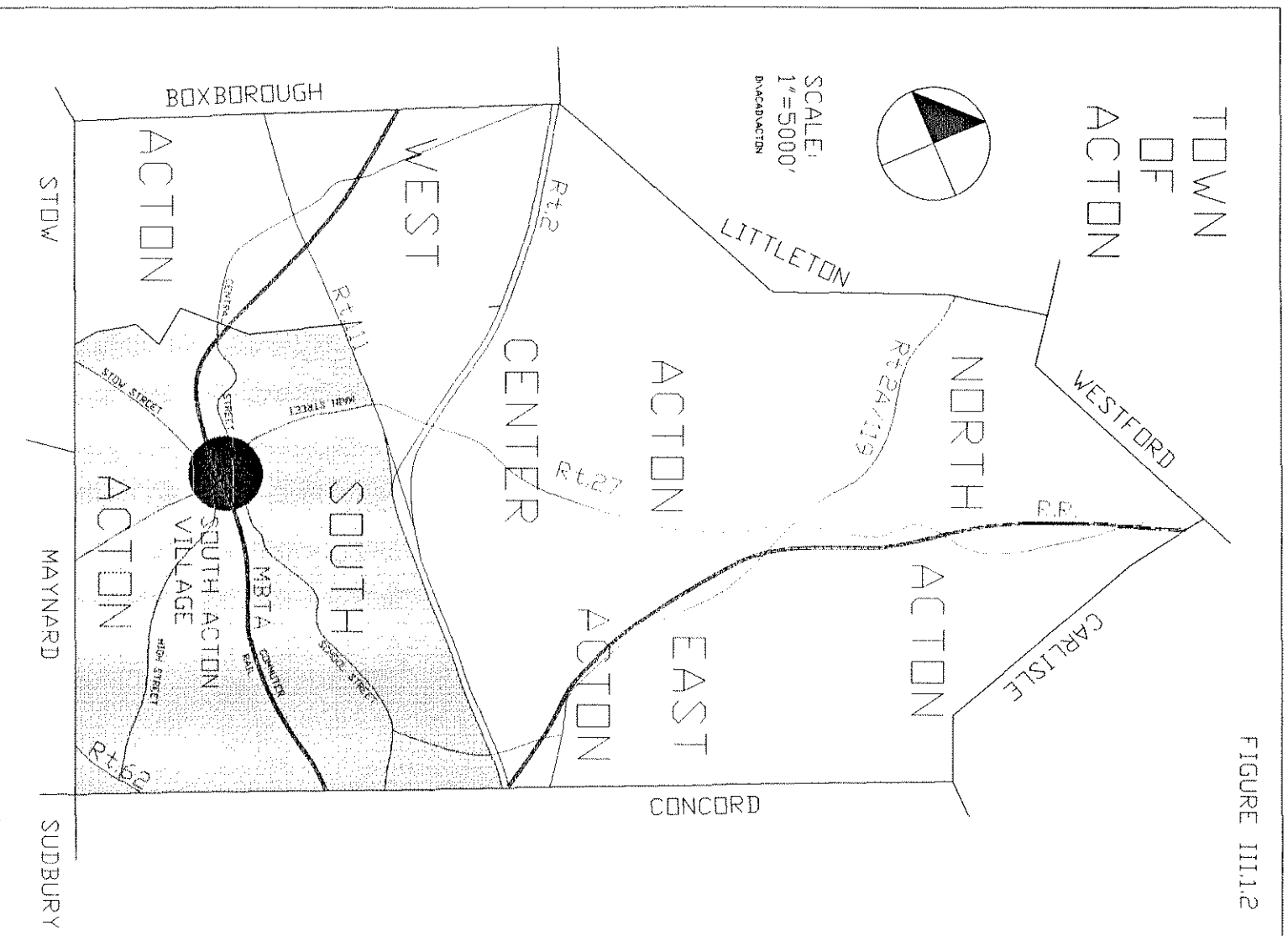
South Acton Village is one of four village centers historically identified within the corporate limits of the Town of Acton. Acton is located 20 miles west-northwest of the City of Boston (*Figure III.1.1*) and comprises a total land area of approximately 20 square miles. It is located between Route 128 and Interstate 495, the two principal highways encircling the Boston metropolitan area. Acton is divided by Route 2, a major arterial highway leading from Boston in a westerly direction towards North Central and Western Massachusetts. The commuter rail line from Boston to Fitchburg, operated by the MBTA also runs through the Town. South Acton generally is defined as the South East quadrant of the Town of Acton (*Figure III.1.2*) comprising a land area of about 5.6 square miles, and bounded by Route 2 and Route 111 in the north, the Concord town line in the east, the Maynard and Stow town lines in the south and the Heath Hen Meadow and Fort Pond Brooks in the west.

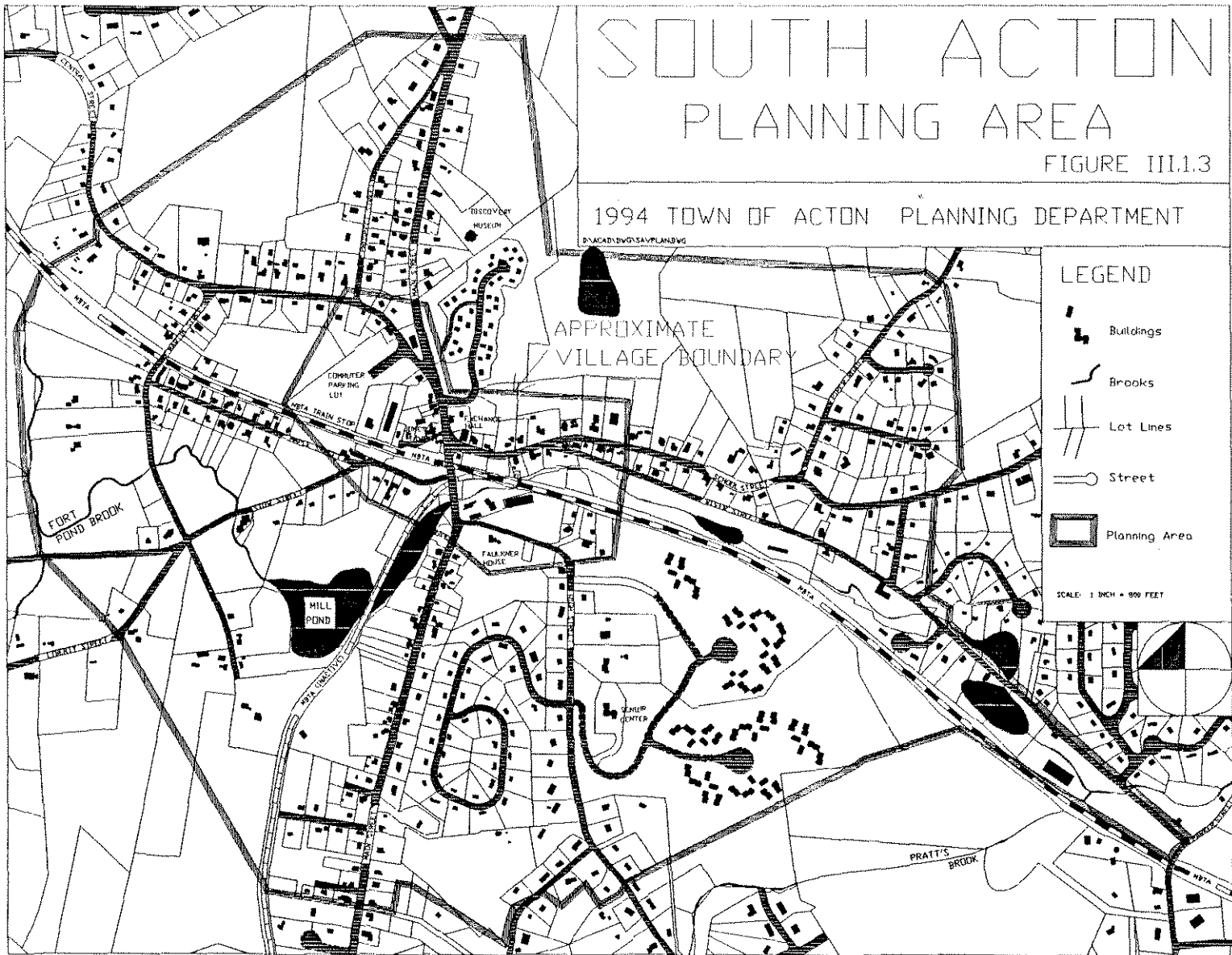
South Acton Village is located on Main Street (Route 27), about 1 mile south of Route 2, and 2 miles north from downtown Maynard. In its center, several other roads come together, School Street leading to West Concord and East Acton, Central Street to West Acton, High Street to the Powder Mill Road commercial area on Route 62 and to Sudbury, and Stow and Liberty Streets to Stow. The intersection of School Street with Main Street form the center of South Acton Village and is known as Quimby Square. The Village is serviced by the Boston-Fitchburg commuter rail, its tracks dissect the village in the center. The Village, the immediately surrounding neighborhoods and the corridor along Fort Pond Brook to Parker Street comprise the planning area of the South Acton Village Plan (*Figure III.1.3*). Except for the Fort Pond Brook corridor, which extends approximately 1 mile to the east of the village center, the planning area is limited to more or less a one half mile radius of the South Acton Village Center and comprises approximately 1 square mile.

Map of EASTERN MASSACHUSETTS

Figure III.1.1





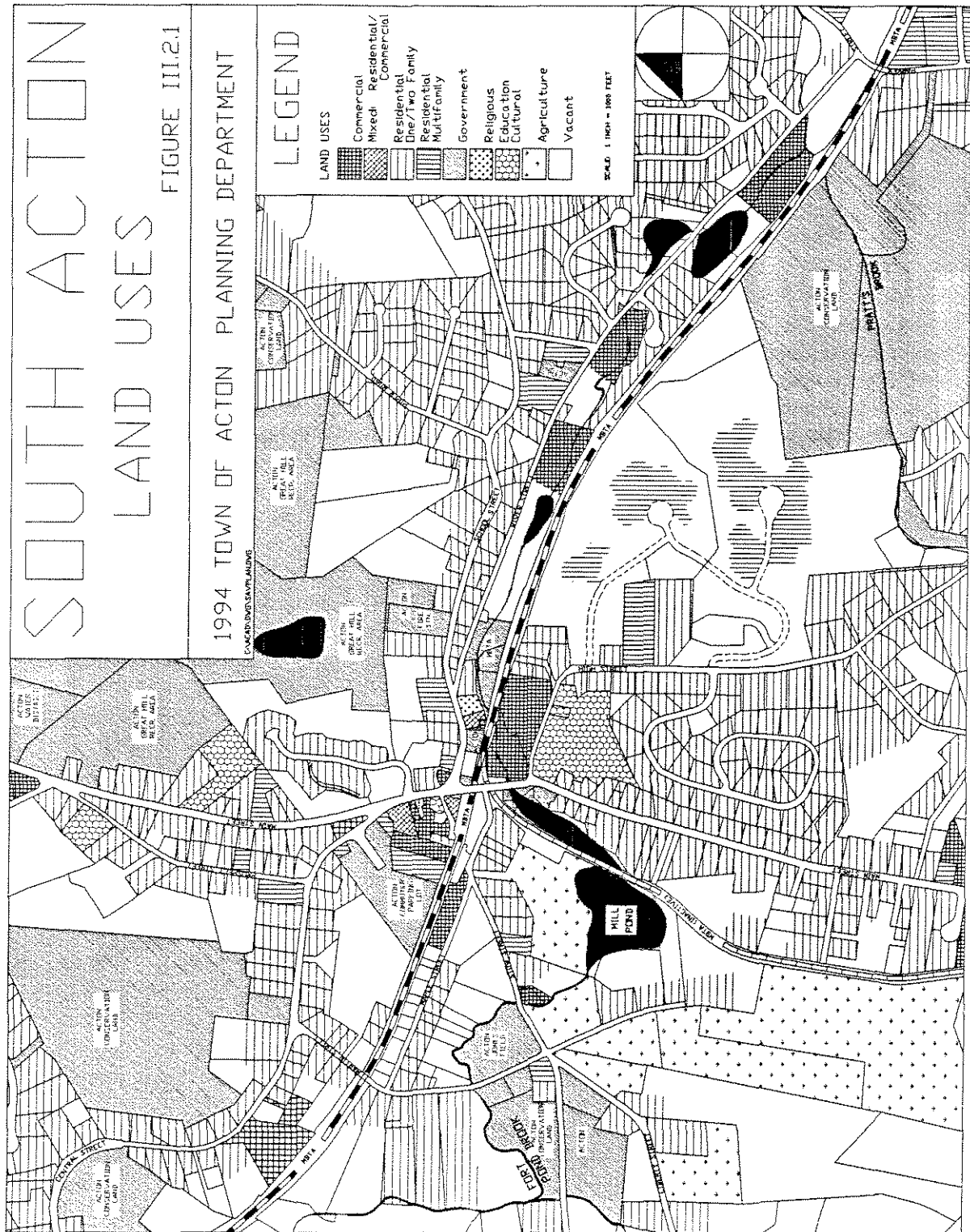


SECTION 2.

EXISTING LAND USES

South Acton Village was Acton's first commercial and industrial center. Figure III.2.1 shows that today most commercial uses are still concentrated in the village center near the intersections of Main Street with Central, School and High Streets. These are without exception small retail and service businesses, including three automobile repair services, and small industrial type enterprises. Buildings are often occupied by more than one business, or by a combination of businesses and residences. Several multifamily buildings (three or more dwelling units) are also located in the village center. Exchange Hall is by far the most prominent commercial building, although like some other buildings in the village center it is not fully occupied. Jones Tavern and the Faulkner House are maintained as historic museums. The Exchange Hall, Jones Tavern and Faulkner House are on the national register of historic places. There are vacant parcels where former buildings have burned down. The South Acton Congregational Church and a fire station are located on School Street. At the west side of the village is the MBTA train stop with commuter rail service to Boston. There is a 260 car parking lot owned and maintained by the Town.

Extending from the village center are several older, turn of the century neighborhoods along Main Street, Prospect Street, Central Street, School Street, Maple Street and Martin Street. Surrounding these areas are contemporary residential developments begun in the 1950's and 1960's, and still being built today. Generally, single family homes prevail, but two family and multifamily dwellings are scattered throughout, particularly in the older neighborhoods. There are significant tracts of open land surrounding the village, many of them are protected open space owned by the Town of Acton for conservation and recreation purposes. On the southwest edge of the village is Stonefield Farm, one of the few remaining farm operations in Acton, growing vegetables and ornamental flowers.



SECTION 3.

HISTORIC BACKGROUND AND RESOURCES

The area first known as South Acton's "Mill Corner", and later as South Acton Village, is best known as the location of Acton's first village center. It was originally a portion of a 1,000 acre farm land grant (ca. 1654) which also included what is now known as West Concord. The farm was sold to the Concord Iron Works Company which built a forge on the Assabet River and used much of the rest of the land for fuel wood to feed the furnaces of the bog iron operation. The company ceased operations by the century's end. In 1701, three visionaries, Ephraim Jones, Samuel Jones and Jonathan Knight bought 600 acres of the western part of the land (all of it in the south of Acton) to harness the water-power of the "Great Brook" (Fort Pond Brook) for the establishment of mills south of the dam they built in 1702. This dam was at the same location as the present one (the Erikson Dam), which is an 1840's replacement. Hence the name Mill Corner evolved for South Acton. At one time there were seven mill operations along Fort Pond Brook which produced a full range of products including flour, plaster, lumber, piano stools and recycled wool.

South Acton's most prosperous period, from the late 1840's through the 1890's, came with the arrival in 1844 of the Fitchburg Railroad. Building density which defines today's village character was largely formed during this period. South Acton contained a mid-nineteenth century hotel (the American House at 19 Railroad Street), several buildings that were part of the Tuttles, Jones & Wetherbee Department Store (two remain: Exchange Hall, and 124 Main Street - later the South Acton Post Office), a 20th century Red & White store (forerunner of A&P), a livery stable, a newsstand, and others. Use of the railroad expanded until the early twentieth century. By 1900, the center sported a bandstand, watering troughs, a round table and multiple tracks with a grade crossing complete with a crossing guard booth, and a Victorian designed train station (lost to fire in the 1980's). The train line connected through to Springfield and Albany, N.Y. In addition, a trolley system connected South Acton to West Acton and some neighboring towns.

The growing popularity of the automobile sharply changed the fortunes of the business climate of the village. Train service declined, and with little parking and complex intersections, the area could not compete. Furthermore, the trend in the 1960's toward shopping malls (for example Route 2A) further pulled patrons from the village shops. Sealing the fate of commerce then and now, however, is the severe problem of wastewater disposal. With the sole reliance on septic systems South Acton's severe slopes, very high ground water and glacial till soils dramatically restrict the potential of possible land uses.

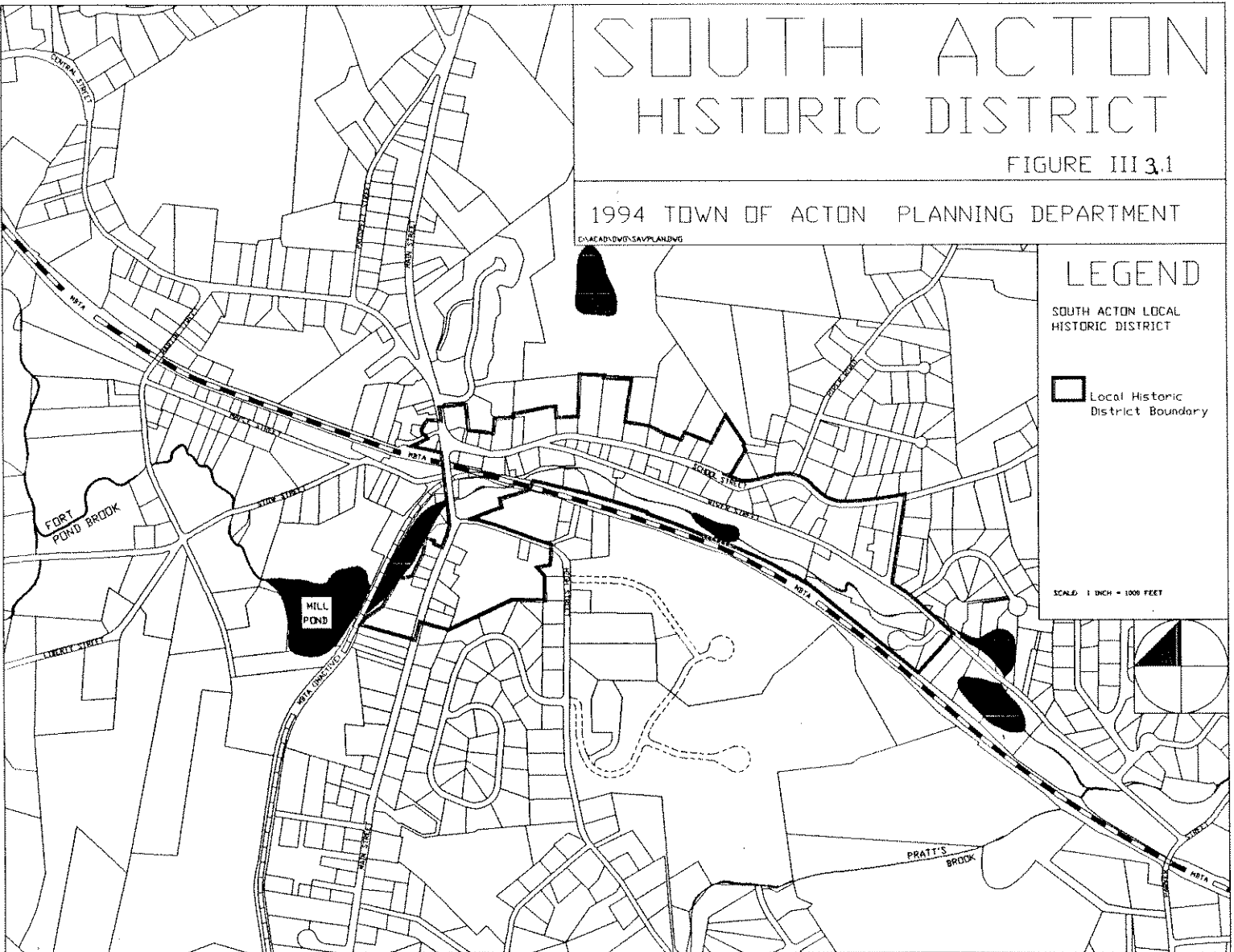
Fortunately, what remains in South Acton in 1994 are most of the buildings left from that more prosperous time mixed with some homes of the more modern styles built from the 1960's

onward. The center contains virtually all of the architectural styles from the seventeenth century to the present. One wooden mill building along River Street is still standing, some of the original fulling mill belonging to the Faulkner Homestead may still stand (now part of Erikson's Grain Mill), and the mill race and footings of the Merriam Piano Stool factory also still stand although the mill itself was lost to fire some time ago.

Because of the important efforts of two individuals, Mary Hadley and Barbara Nylander, the 1732 Jones Tavern was rescued in the early 1960's just as it was being dismantled. Out of their vision was formed the historic organization known as The Iron Work Farm in Acton, Inc. The organization went on to purchase the 1707 Faulkner House. By 1980, the Faulkner House and the Jones Tavern were both included in the National Register for Historic Places, as was the 1860 Exchange Hall. In the early 1980's, the South Acton Revitalization Committee (SARC) formed to revitalize South Acton. An initial planning study cosponsored by SARC and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council resulted in the 1982 South Acton Technical Report. With the help of SARC the Town of Acton was able to secure a substantial sum of money for revitalization and planning efforts directed toward South Acton. Some of this money was used together with matching funds from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to fund local historic district studies for three villages in Acton. Since 1990, local historic district designation is in effect for South Acton Village, West Acton Village, and Acton Center (*Figure III.3.1, South Acton Local Historic District*).

SARC, together with The Iron Work Farm, town officials and other town organizations and individual citizens encouraged the Town of Acton to formally study South Acton's ongoing septic problems. The result of these efforts over a twelve year period are well documented in numerous reports published under the auspices of the Health Department. In 1986 town meeting voted for a limited sewerage project for South Acton Village and Kelley's Corner to the north. However, with the subsequent expiration of federal and state subsidy programs the project never began.

Following the release of the town wide 1991 Acton Master Plan, planning efforts focused on Acton's village centers, including once again on South Acton Village. This document, prepared by the South Acton Village Planning Committee is the culmination of this most recent effort. It is the committee's sincere hope that this document will be a blueprint for South Acton's long awaited renewal.



SECTION 4.

NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONSTRAINTS

TOPOGRAPHY AND SURFACE GEOLOGY

The landscape within the South Acton Village planning area, as for the rest of Acton is primarily shaped by the last ice age which occurred 13-26,000 years ago. In geologic terms that is very recent. Therefore, the shape of the terrain with its rolling hills and often wide stream valleys is very close to that left behind by the glaciers. Soils since formed on the surface are rather immature and erosion since that time has been very limited.

The principal surface formation within the planning area is Non-stratified Drift or Glacial Till (Ref: W.R. Hansen, *Geology and Mineral Resources of the Hudson and Maynard Quadrangles, Massachusetts*, Geological Survey Bulletin 1038, 1956; and Map by W.R. Hansen, 1948). This material, deposited directly by glaciers, is composed of unsorted rock fragments of all sizes from minute clay particles to large boulders. Two formations are most common. One is known as Ground Moraine - this is glacial till deposited in broad but relatively thin sheets, featuring a gently rolling surface relief which largely reflects the topography of the underlying bedrock. Bedrock Outcrops are frequent in this formation. The other is known as Drumlins - these are oval or elongated, rounded hills of till material with a similar composition as ground moraines. Drumlins form prominent hills throughout the region.

Due to the composition of unsorted rock fragments of all sizes, pore volume within glacial till is very small, and its mineral surfaces are very adhesive allowing little movement of free water. While these properties result in a high filter capacity, they cause slow water infiltration or percolation rates. Therefore, this material is generally poorly suited for use in septic tank absorption fields constructed in compliance with Massachusetts health and environmental regulations (Title V). Occasional layers of compacted, virtually impenetrable silt or clay, known as Hardpan, exacerbate the situation locally. There is little available groundwater. Particularly where mature vegetation is lacking, the slow infiltration rates translate into high storm water surface runoff, raising the risk of increased erosion, siltation and pollution of down-gradient water resources. Ground Moraines and Drumlins make up over 95% of the surficial geology within the planning area.

The geological map by Hansen shows on the westerly fringe of the planning area some sand and silt deposits. They are overlaid with wetlands that are bordering Fort Pond Brook and some of its small tributaries. The map also shows a small pocket of sand and gravel approximately in the location of the skating pond behind the South Acton Fire Station.

South Acton Village is at the approximate elevation of 210 feet above sea level and located in a

gap between Great Hill (356 feet), a Drumlin to the north, and Faulkner Hill (321 feet) and Audubon Hill (300 feet), two adjacent drumlins to the south (See United States Geological Survey (U.S.G.S.) Map, Maynard Quadrangle, 1965; and *Figure III.4.1* for South Acton enlargement). These drumlins feature relatively steep slopes (in excess of 15 %) on most flanks. Looking west from the village center the landscape opens into a slightly rolling plain with elevations not exceeding 210 feet. A few hills can be seen in the distance. The plain consists primarily of ground moraines intersected by the meandering stream bed of Fort Pond Brook. The brook enters the village center and passes eastward through the gap between the drumlins. Here the gradient of brook increases sharply and the flow picks up considerable speed. The ground moraine has been washed away and bedrock is exposed in this area. East of the drumlins, Fort Pond Brook flows in a narrow valley that is cut with moderate to steep slopes into the rolling hills of the ground moraine.

SOILS

The surface material left by the glaciers slowly developed into different soils through the influences of climate, vegetation and topography. For a detailed analysis and map of soil types found in the planning area refer to the 1988 Interim Soil Survey Report for Middlesex County and the 1989 draft soils map (U.S. Soil Conservation Service). The report describes the soil types and their physical, chemical and engineering properties, and evaluates them for their suitability for various uses such as for septic absorption fields, agricultural land, forest land, and building sites.

The U.S. Soil Conservation Service in its "Soil Potential Ratings for Septic Absorption Fields, Middlesex and Essex Counties", 1985 provides further information on septic suitability for each soil type. Where rated, septic suitability of soils in the planning area is overwhelmingly poor, although there are some larger areas northwest and northeast of the village with a higher potential for septic tank absorption fields (*Figure III.4.2*). Low and very low potential ratings are described by conditions where performance is much or significantly below standard, corrective measures are costly and continuing limitations detract from environmental quality. Medium, high and very high potential ratings indicate gradually improved to excellent soil conditions. These are areas where explorations might be worthwhile to locate a larger leaching field for a treatment plant. Non-rated areas generally are water bodies and soils disturbed by human settlement or other activity. The low potential rating for septic suitability in much of the planning area makes the use of septic systems in South Acton Village impossible or at least undesirable. Currently all residences and other buildings in and around South Acton Village are served by septic systems, older cesspools or possibly no disposal system at all. Failure rates of existing systems are very high and with few exceptions system replacements or installation of new systems that meet today's technical and environmental requirements are impossible or at least very difficult and costly. Continued reliance on septic systems will place severe constraints on future development and rehabilitation, hamper the viability of the village economy, limit the

marketability of its business and residential properties, and will continue to detract from the environmental quality of the area.

The planning area also contains some soil types which are rated high for their suitability for agricultural uses (*Figure III.4.3*). Areas with important agricultural soils are classified into two categories: "Prime Farmland" and "State or Locally Important Farmland". Refer to the 1991 Acton Master Plan and the U.S. Soil Conservation Service Interim Soil Survey Report for a description of these classification. Prime Farmland is found in the area around the southern end of Martin Street where the Stonefield Farm (Simeone's farm) is situated. Knowledge of the location of significant agricultural land resources can help focus farm land preservation efforts.

Note that the Soil Conservation Service field investigations are made on a rather coarse grid. Therefore the maps shown in *Figures III.4.2* and *III.4.3* are not sufficiently accurate to draw definitive conclusions. They should be used only as a guide.

SURFACE WATER

Fort Pond Brook is the principal surface water resource in South Acton. It flows through South Acton Village from the west to the east (*Figure III.1.3*). It originates in the area of Long Pond and Fort Pond in Littleton. The watershed area of Fort Pond Brook above its pass through the village encompasses approximately 20 square miles. Tributaries are Guggins and Inch Brooks from Boxborough, Heathen (Heath Hen) Meadow Brook from Boxborough and Stow and Grassy Pond Brook from within Acton. Upstream from South Acton Village, Fort Pond Brook has a low descent rate. It enters the planning area just west of Martin Street with a stream bed elevation at 190 feet. Here, its slow moving waters meander heavily, bring fluvial silt deposits and cause frequent and extensive flooding. Erikson Dam (top dam elevation 190 feet), located in the river bed within the village immediately east of Main Street, creates the Mill Pond. The pond extends upstream and southwest of the village.

From the Erikson Dam eastward, the terrain allows Fort Pond Brook to increase its descent rate. It leaves Erikson Dam at a stream bed elevation of 178 feet from where it rapidly descends through the valley between Great Hill and Audubon Hill to approximately 130 feet elevation near River and Parker Streets where it leaves the planning area. In this segment the brook's water power had been harnessed early, giving rise to South Acton Village as a small mill town in the late 18th and into the early 20th century. Two other dams, the lower one of them known as Merriam Dam, follow in this segment downstream from the Erikson Dam and slow down its the flow. But due to their poor condition, the steeper descent of the brook and the narrower width of the valley, they create only small impoundments.

Just before Parker Street the stream receives Pratt's Brook as the only significant tributary within the planning area. From Parker Street, Fort Pond Brook resumes a slow descent with

meanders and broader flood plains until it joins Nashoba Brook in Concord, passes through Warner's Pond and finally drains into the Assabet River.

The Fort Pond Brook watershed is part of the Concord River Basin (also known as the SuAsCo River Basin - for the Sudbury, Assabet and Concord Rivers) which is part of the Merrimac River drainage system.

Water quality of Fort Pond Brook is rated in Class B by the Massachusetts Division of Water Pollution Control which is one class below drinking water quality. Class B waters are designated for the protection and propagation of fish and other aquatic plant and animal life, and for recreational activities such as swimming and fishing. The rating is based on dissolved oxygen, acidity, temperature and fecal coliform counts. While water quality is rated good, this rating should be viewed with skepticism where Fort Pond Brook passes through South Acton Village. Chronic septic system failures or complete lack of septic systems causes direct sewage discharge into the brook. Coliform counts exceeding those acceptable for Class B should be expected. The higher density of settlement in the village, together with the commercial and industrial activities is certain to cause additional pollutant loading. Water quality may recover somewhat downstream.

Recreation potential along Fort Pond Brook is high. Particularly upstream from the village center, Mill Pond is a significant and scenic resource for passive recreational activities and fishing. Canoeing is possible from Mill Pond further upstream. Within the village and downstream from the village, recreational activities are more restricted due to the (sometimes odorous) pollutant loading and due to conflicting land uses along the brook. Public access to the Brook and to Mill Pond is underdeveloped throughout the planning area.

WETLANDS AND FLOOD PLAIN AREAS

The planning area features extensive vegetated wetlands and flood plains primarily associated with Fort Pond Brook and mostly located to the west of South Acton Village, upstream from Erikson Dam (*Figure III.4.4*). More isolated vegetated wetlands of varying size can also be found scattered throughout the planning area.

Vegetated wetlands are swamps with surface vegetation where water is found at or near the surface for at least part of the year. Certain plant species such as cat tail, various sedges or swamp maple are characteristic wetlands species. When kept from reforestation, wetlands help maintain some of the rural character of area communities after farming activities have virtually ceased. From a natural resource perspective, wetlands provide important wildlife habitat, help moderate the extent of flooding and the severity of drought conditions, and have limited capacity to filter pollutants entering with natural drainage waters from adjacent uplands. Vegetated wetlands and open surface waters are protected through the Massachusetts

Wetlands Protection Act and local bylaws which limit, but don't entirely prohibit, interference with this natural resource.

Flood Plains are generally defined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency as areas subject to flooding at least once in the course of 100 years. The upper and outer limit of this flood plain is defined as the 100-year flood elevation. Flooding in the area occurs frequently although rarely approaching the full extent of the 100-year flood. A few buildings within the planning area are located in the flood plain. Their owners are generally required to carry special flood insurance.

While flood plains would occur naturally in the area, they are enlarged through dams and other restrictions to the water flow such as bridges and culverts, most notably the Martin Street culvert. The extend of the flood plain is also influenced by the conditions in the approximately 20 square mile watershed of Fort Pond Brook upstream from South Acton Village. Land development without proper flood and erosion control devices, extensive logging, loss of wetlands, or the cumulative effect of all these activities cause an accelerated release of storm waters, which in turn results in a gradual increase in the severity of floods. Today, there are greater efforts through federal law and local regulations to protect downstream areas from increases in flooding. The thrust of these regulations is to maintain the status quo by requiring controls in storm water runoff and prohibiting the filling of flood plains. New building construction within the flood plains is not permitted.

GROUNDWATER

The Town of Acton public water supply depends entirely on groundwater. No municipal water supply well is located within or near the planning area. However, Fort Pond Brook downstream from South Acton Village passes through an important well area with 3 public wells: Christoffersen, Scribner, and Lawsbrook wells. Stream water and groundwater do interact and exchanges take place. Therefore, significant pollution in Fort Pond Brook can impact public drinking water quality.

VEGETATION AND WILDLIFE

Fort Pond Brook can be regarded as a significant local resource for aquatic wildlife and sport fisheries. Wetlands are abundant and provide vital habitat for birds and other wildlife. Open fields occur only around the southerly end of Martin Street, where the Stonefield Farm is operating. In addition, several open meadows in the wetlands along Fort Pond Brook were previously cut for hay and bedding grass. These meadows are now abandoned and show advanced encroachment by bushes and trees. This slow natural reforestation could mean a loss in the variety of wildlife habitats and a change in the landscape character of the village and

its vicinity. In South Acton two broad classes of Forest Associations occur: the Oak-Hickory Association and the Elm-Ash-Red Maple Association. Both forest associations can occur in a variety of local and regional types depending on soil moisture, nutrient availability exposure and other factors. Great Hill features one the largest contiguous tract of upland woods in Acton. Historical records at the Massachusetts Natural Heritage Program list the rare Small Yellow Lady's Slipper Orchid (*Cypripedium calceolus* var. *parviflorum*) to occur in the Great Hill area.

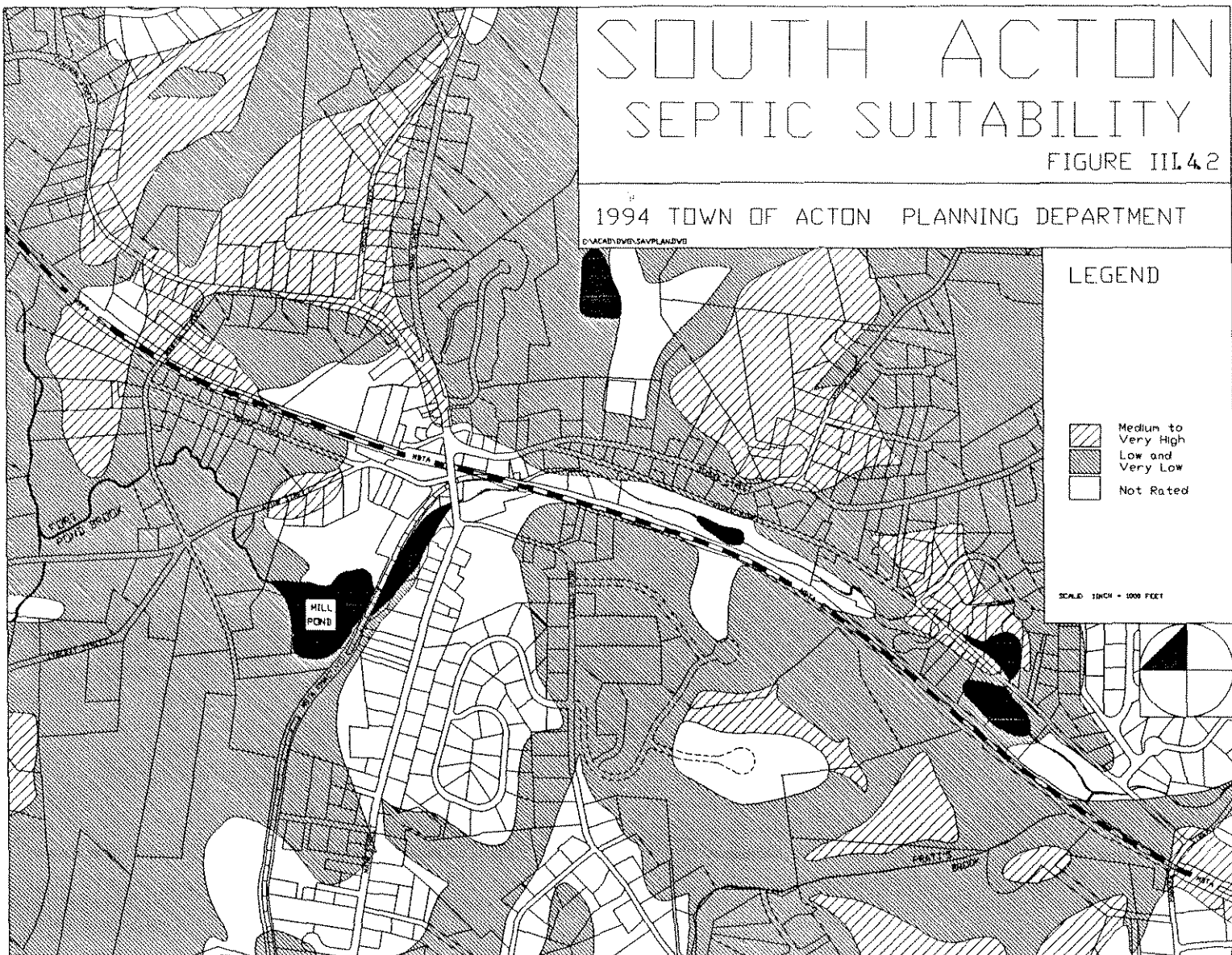
NATURAL RESOURCES PROTECTION

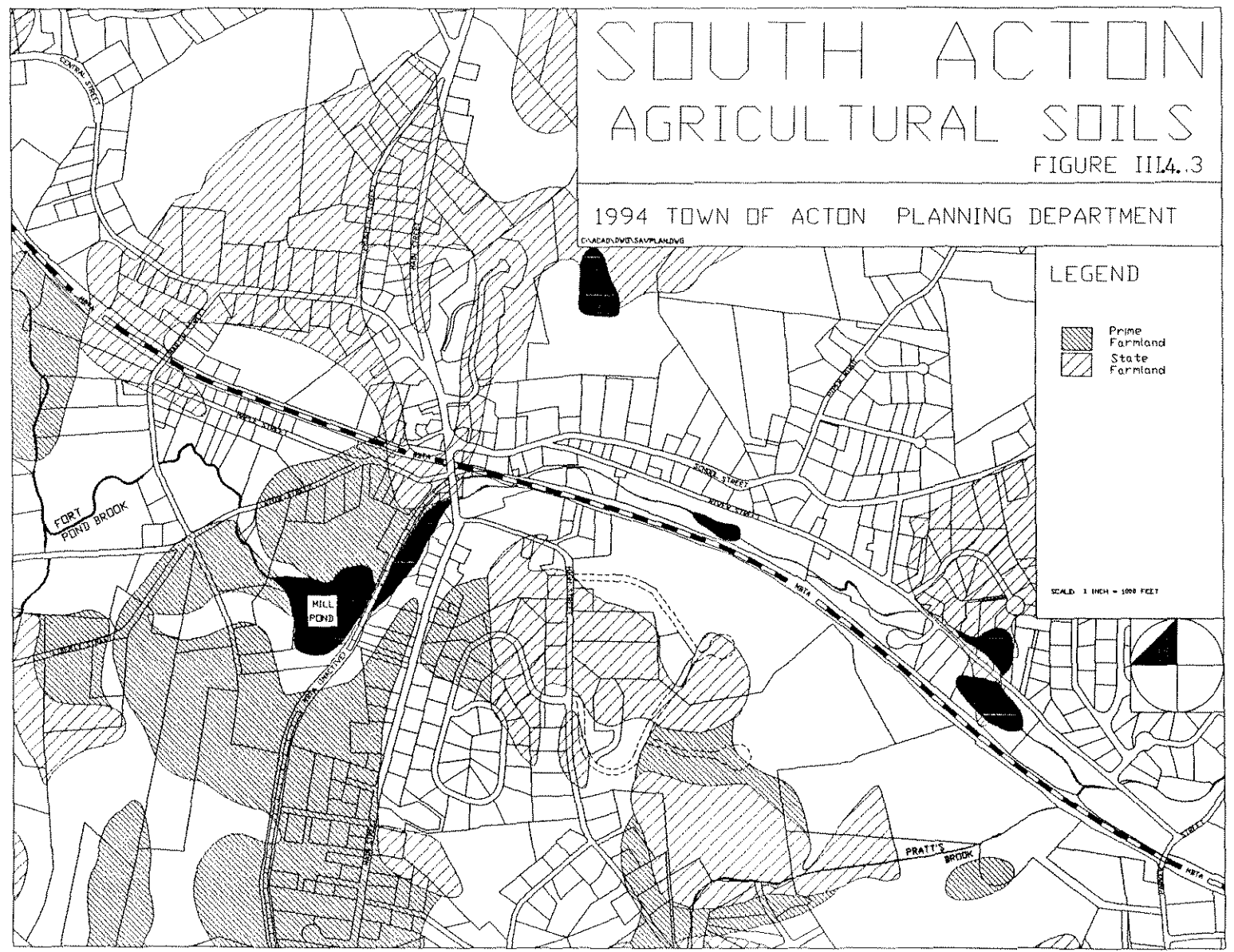
Streams, wetlands and flood plains are reasonably protected through federal, state and local laws. Equally important for wildlife and for maintaining the character of an area is the protection of upland open spaces. For maximum benefit to wildlife and recreation value, protected open spaces should be linked through open space corridors or "green belts".

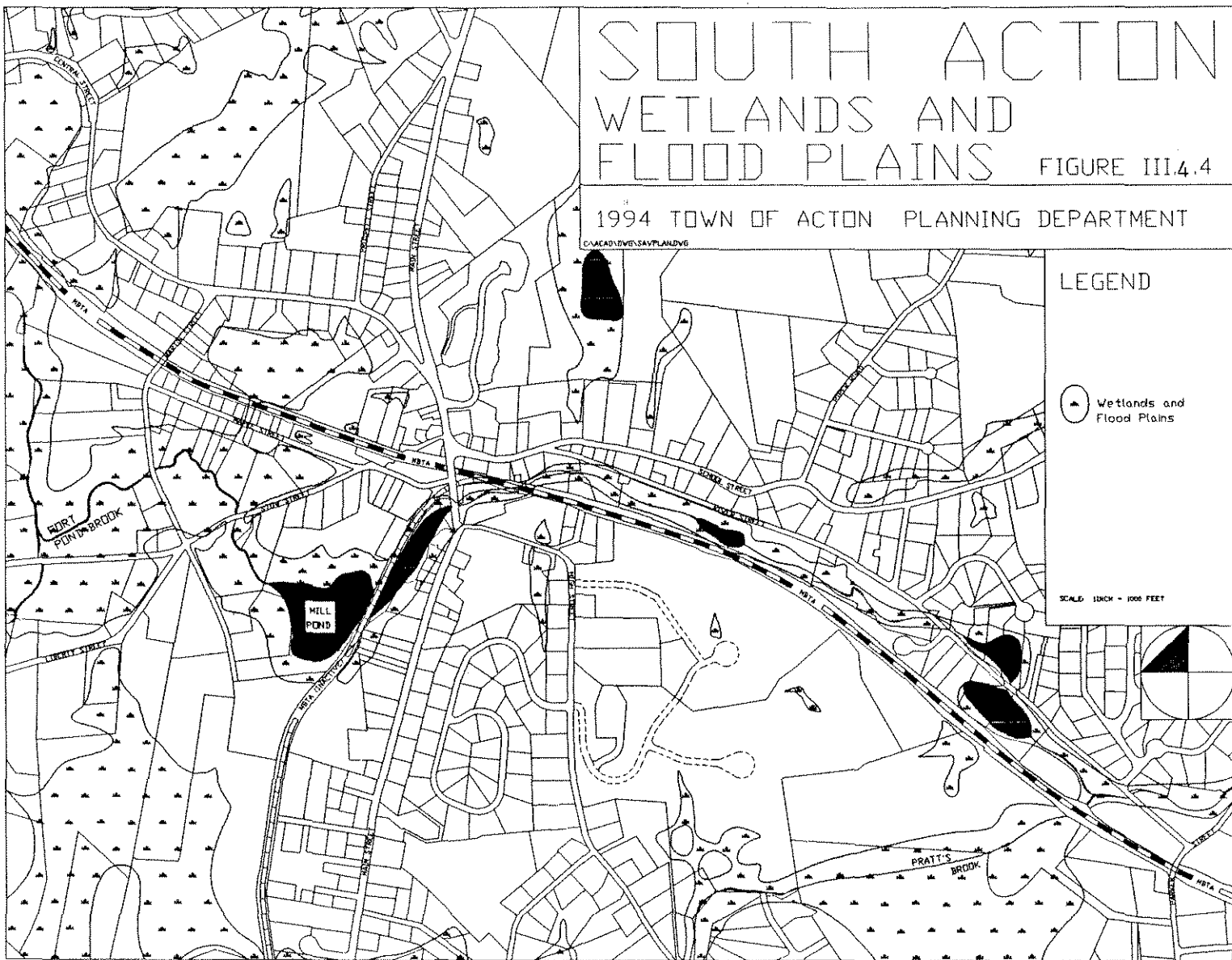
In close proximity to residential areas and within village centers parks, playgrounds and active recreation facilities are highly valued amenities.

In the planning area and immediately adjacent to it, the Town of Acton owns three large tracts of conservation and recreation land: The Great Hill Recreation Area, the Pratt's Brook Conservation Land, and another large piece north of Central Street. (*Figure III.2.1*). The Great Hill Recreation Area is one of the largest tracts of conservation land in the Town of Acton. Its 185 acres feature about 2.7 miles of hiking trails over hilly terrain, past some wetlands and small brooks. Town owned conservation lands hold the highest degree of open space protection. Conservation lands are designated by public policy and public funds have been spent for acquisition and maintenance. Removing conservation restrictions from such lands requires approval from the State legislature.

State law, Chapter 61, 61A and 61B, provide mechanisms intended to encourage landowners to keep their lands undeveloped and in some form of productive agricultural or forestry use, or to maintain it for outdoor recreation purposes. Within the planning area Stonefield Farm (Simeone Farm) maintains lands under Chapter 61A which applies to land in agricultural use (*Figure III.2.1*). Owners participating under a Ch.61, 61A or 61B program enjoy a reduced tax burden. Before land under any such program can be sold, the Town is given a 120-day right of first refusal. During this 120-day period the Town may either raise the funds to purchase the property at fair market value, negotiate alternative options for partial development, or decide not to act on its right of first refusal. However, removal of land from these programs is relatively easy although back taxes and penalties must be paid. While certain procedural restrictions apply to the sale and development of lands under Chapter 61, 61A or 61B, they cannot be regarded as protected open space.







SECTION 5.

RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

South Acton Village and its surrounding areas feature several recreational opportunities (*Figure III.2.1*). The Great Hill Recreation Area features trails for hiking and cross country skiing and can be accessed at several points. At its main access on its south end, behind the South Acton fire station, one finds a skating pond, a small picnic area, a ball field, a small jungle gym and a parking lot. The Pratt's Brook Conservation Area, located at the southeast edge of the planning area, also feature hiking trails and parking spaces. It can be accessed from Parker Street near the railroad crossing, and from Brewster Lane, via High Street and Audubon Drive. Jones Field on the west side of the planning area, in the corner of Stow and Martin Streets, features a ball field and playground equipment. Mill Pond Park in the village center off Main Street just south of Maple Street provides limited access to Mill Pond.

Fort Pond Brook and Mill Pond represent significant recreational opportunities which are currently underutilized. Upstream from the village center, public land access is available at Jones Field, Mill Pond Park and various brook crossings, but access is generally underdeveloped. The dead-end, inactive railroad spur which leads from the village center towards Maynard holds significant potential to improving and broadening access to Mill Pond. It is currently owner by the MBTA. Downstream from the village center, two prime obstacles prevent Fort Pond Brook from becoming a recreational resource: Lack of public access, except at three brook crossings along River Street, and pollution due to failing septic systems and direct sewage release into the brook in the South Acton Village area. While the area has great potential for park development due to its scenic qualities, the pollution problem must be corrected before this segment of Fort Pond Brook can be targeted for increased recreational access and activity.

In the survey and in public meetings, residents emphasized the need to maintain and improve existing recreation facilities. Some residents suggested that benches at the skating pond and lighting of the area behind the fire station would greatly improve its user friendliness. Many residents also pointed out the need for improved sidewalks, walk ways, bike ways and bike racks. Also, a pool or swimming pond and an outdoor eatery or cafe were frequently mentioned as recreational opportunities which would be desirable in South Acton Village.

SECTION 6.

ECONOMIC RESOURCES

The village of South Acton and its surroundings have seen more prosperous times in the past. A brief summary of the historical development of the village, including its economic and industrial history, is presented in Part III, Section V. Today, many of the former mill and factory sites along Fort Pond Brook have become vacant or been converted to other uses. Many of the old industrial buildings no longer exist.

A small number of general and specialty services, automobile repair services and specialty retail stores are concentrated along Main Street between its intersections with High Street and Central Street. They are from north to south:

The Acton Music Center, located in the former "First Universalist Church" at 140 Main Street;
Two hair salons at 136 Main Street - Salon 136 and Feathers;
Fido's pet shop and pet grooming at 134 Main Street;
The India Palace at 134 Main Street, offering clothing and ethnic merchandise;
PSI Insurance service and Nutting Auto Body at 130 Main Street;
Wood Works (fine carpentry and cabinets) and the Art Exchange Gallery (arts & crafts) are located in the Exchange Hall at the corner of School and Main Streets;
Erikson Feed and Pet Supply is located at the corner of High and Main Streets.

A variety of services and industries are located along the side streets:

Mobile Tech automobile repair services at 5 Railroad Street;
A personal storage facility (mini-warehouse) is located at 13 Railroad Street;
Gordon Richards building supply and services at 25 Maple Street;
School Street Garage (Auto Repair) at 27 School Street;
Lazaro Paving Contractors at 53 River Street;
Minuteman Pre-hung Doors, Lisa Coolidge Woodworking and Contract Sweeping and Maintenance at
81-84 River Street (the 1902 Lothrop Factory (Flannery Mill));
Burke Moving and Storage at 115 River Street;
Waitco Precision Machining at 4 High Street.

Additionally, small home based businesses are scattered throughout the planning area. Just north of the Planning Area, at the intersection of Prospect and Main Streets is the Acton Shopping Center with a Super Market (Donelan's), a Hardware Store (Acton Supply), a gas station and a number of other stores and services. Just south of the Planning Area towards the Maynard Town line are the Country Cupboard (offering convenience groceries, beer and wine), Village Auto Sales (a SAAB dealership) and the facility of Beacon Community Newspapers.

Important institutions within the planning area are the Children's and Science Discovery Museum on Main Street north of the village center, and the Iron Work Farm which operates the Faulkner House and Jones Tavern Museums. Both are located in the village center.

The South Acton Village Planning Committee in early 1992 distributed a survey to South Acton businesses within the planning area (see Appendix). 9 proprietors completed and returned the survey forms. According to the information given by them, their businesses employ 35 persons including themselves. Based on their type and size it is estimated that businesses within the planning area provide between 80 and 120 jobs and professional positions, including the business operators themselves. This figure does not include home based businesses. A significant number of these jobs is assumed to be part time or seasonal. The Acton Shopping Center just north of the planning area and Beacon Community Newspapers just south of the planning area are also significant employment locations. The Beacon Community Newspapers reported 120 employees in the late 1980's.

The 1992 business survey revealed several other key issues for businesses in the planning area. Pedestrian convenience, parking availability and traffic flow receive a poor rating by many business owners. Most responding business owners sense a strong need to improve the South Acton infrastructure such as replacing the Main Street bridge, installing traffic signal control at the School Street intersection and building sewers. They also express that the area needs more commerce and a general overhaul to improve its appearance. Recognizing that the commuter rail link with its parking lot exposes the area to potential customers and clients, some respondents consider the train station to be the greatest asset of South Acton Village which they wish to see expanded to increase parking capacity and that businesses catering to commuter rail users should be encouraged. Most responding business owners did not see themselves in the position to contribute through taxes or special assessments to help improve South Acton's infrastructure. However, building sewers is the exception. The majority of the respondents find that sewers is worth their investment, too. The majority of responding business owners report their business to occupy from less than 1000 to 3000 square feet of building area. A majority of the respondents had their business located in South Acton between 5 and 9 years, and a majority sees a slight improvement in the development of their business. The principal reason mentioned in the survey for locating a business in South Acton is the availability of building space at a reasonable price. The installation of sewers, improved truck accessibility and the encouragement of existing and new businesses in South Acton, utilizing existing vacant building space and vacant lots, were considered most important to improve the business climate.

The biggest obstacle to business as well as residential growth is the lack of adequate waste water treatment facilities to service the existing land uses, much less any new or expanded land uses that would be necessary to help revitalize South Acton Village. Without improvement of this situation, private investment in the village properties will likely diminish even further. Also very important are improvements in the streets and intersection within the village to improve

pedestrian friendliness and accessibility as well as overall traffic safety. Improved accessibility to existing parking lots is at least as important as new parking facilities. The vacant and underutilized buildings could provide affordable space for small and start-up businesses and industries. The presence of the commuter train station in South Acton Village is a unique feature and can be regarded as a potential stimulus to South Acton's revitalization.

The size of South Acton Village, its richness of historic character and sites worth preservation, and perhaps most importantly its disadvantaged location, will continue to limit and pace its growth as a business center. However, it would appear that neighborhood oriented businesses and services with a personal touch could thrive. Specialty service and retail outfits, and perhaps a restaurant might do well if they understand how to draw customers from a larger area and to build and maintain a good reputation and name recognition. Manufacturing should be encouraged as it is less dependent on the daily walk-in customer, while at the same it brings people to the area. This brief and somewhat hopeful outlook on the resources, limitations and opportunities should be corroborated with a solid market study for the South Acton Village Area.

SECTION 7.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

The 1992 survey to South Acton residents also asked questions regarding the age of household members, household income, duration of residence in South Acton, future plans of residency and home ownership. While the overall survey return rate of 17.54% was very high, the results of these survey questions should be considered only as an indicator of South Acton demographic characteristics, not as hard facts. No statistical tests were performed to determine how well the survey results might represent the true characteristics of the South Acton population. Responding to the survey was entirely elective, and no follow up calls or visits were made to anyone who did not respond. Where town wide 1990 census data are available, they are shown for comparison. Except as noted in the following, the results of the survey correspond fairly well to the census data. It appears from the survey that there are

Table III.7.1 - Population by Age (in %)

Age	South Acton Survey (1992) (In % of all returns)	South Acton Survey (1992) (in % of returns from beyond 1/2 mile of village center)	South Acton Survey (1992) (in % of returns from within 1/2 mile of village center)	1990 Census Town of Acton
0-4	6.8	4.5	9.6	6.9
5-17	19.9	21.1	17.7	18.2
18-24	6.9	6.5	7.5	8.4
25-49	45.0	45.0	45.0	45.5
50-64	14.6	16.2	12.8	14.3
65 & over	6.9	6.7	7.5	6.6

relatively more upper income households in the South Acton area than in Acton as a whole (Table III.7.2). Also owner occupancy of dwelling units in the South Acton area appears to be

much higher than in Acton as a whole (Table III.7.3). About three fourth of the surveyed households moved to the South Acton area within the last 20 years (Table III.7.4). An overwhelming 4/5 of the respondents seem committed to their neighborhoods and plan to stay in the foreseeable future (Table III.7.5).

Table III.7.2 - Household Income (in %)

Income (gross, in \$)	South Acton Survey (1992) (in % of all returns)	South Acton Survey (1992) (in % of returns from beyond 1/2 mile of village center)	South Acton Survey (1992) (in % of returns from within 1/2 mile of village center)	1990 Census Town of Acton
0-9,999	1.1	1.3	0.9	4.3
10,000-14,999	1.4	2.5	0.0	1.9
15,000-19,999	3.6	3.1	4.3	-
15,000-24,999	-	-	-	8.1
20,000-29,999	6.1	5.7	6.0	-
25,000-34,999	-	-	-	10.7
30,000-49,999	15.7	12.6	18.8	-
35,000-49,999	-	-	-	15.1
50,000-74,999	23.6	23.9	23.1	21.4
75,000 & over	48.6	50.9	47.0	38.4

Table III.7.3 - Owner and Renter Occupied Housing Units (in %)

Ownership Status	South Acton Survey (1992) (in % of all returns)	South Acton Survey (1992) (in % of returns from beyond 1/2 mile of village center)	South Acton Survey (1992) (in % of returns from within 1/2 mile of village center)	1990 Census Town of Acton
Owner	92.3	92.7	92.2	70.5
Renter	7.7	7.3	7.7	29.5

Table III.7.4 - Duration of Past Tenure in South Acton (in %)

Duration (years)	South Acton Survey (1992) (in % of all returns)	South Acton Survey (1992) (in % of returns from beyond 1/2 mile of village center)	South Acton Survey (1992) (in % of returns from within 1/2 mile of village center)
less than 10	46.0	42.0	50.8
10 - less than 20	30.8	32.8	29.0
20 - less than 30	10.5	16.1	1.6
30 or more	12.8	9.2	18.5

Table III.7.5 - Duration of Planned Tenure in South Acton (in %)

Duration (years)	South Acton Survey (1992) (in % of all returns)	South Acton Survey (1992) (in % of returns from beyond 1/2 mile of village center)	South Acton Survey (1992) (in % of returns from within 1/2 mile of village center)
less than 2	2.6	3.0	1.5
2 - less than 5	6.0	4.8	7.7
5 - less than 10	9.9	11.5	8.5
10 or more; no plans to move	81.5	80.6	82.3

SECTION 8.

BUILD-OUT ANALYSIS

The location and amount of development which can occur in the planning area is determined by Acton's land use regulations and by physical constraints of the land itself. The build-out analysis was performed to identify the maximum potential amount of development, or build-out potential, that is "programmed" by the current land use regulations (principally zoning) given physical constraints such as wetlands and flood plains, and to identify how the proposed alternative regulatory changes might affect this build-out potential. The assumption is that the planning area will build out to its maximum in accordance with the existing or proposed land use regulations, in other words, the results of the analysis show the ultimate amount of development permitted under existing or proposed land use regulations. A build-out analysis is not a growth projection. It makes no prediction about the rate of growth and no time is established for when the build-out condition will occur. Market factors, existing infrastructure limitations and similar factors that might be subject to change over time are not considered in the build-out analysis. For instance, in a strong suburban growth market where rapid influx of people and capital encourages development and helps overcome infrastructure limitations, such as the lack of a sewer collection system, build-out could be reached rather quickly. In weaker markets, as they may be found in rural areas or inner city districts, build-out may be reached only after a long time period, or maybe never.

Using the parcel database developed in the 1991 Town of Acton Master Plan, subsequently updated and modified to reflected recent changes, several build-out analyses were performed to estimate the build-out under current land use regulations and to test various possible regulatory alternatives. This report presents two build-out estimates. One is the build-out estimate under existing land use regulations (*Town of Acton Zoning Bylaw, May 1994*). The other estimates build-out for the proposed alternative land use regulations (*Part II, Section 1 - Regulatory Plan*) which intend to respond to the Goals stated in the Action Plan (*Part I*). Both estimates were performed on all parcels located entirely and partially within the planning area (*Figure III.1.3*). These 446 parcels represent an area of approximately 620 acres. The build-out analysis estimated the amount of total non-residential building floor space and the total number of residential dwelling units under build-out conditions. For the purpose of the build-out estimate, it was assumed that, were possible under zoning, the long term trend of development and changes of uses is towards a maximum in commercial development at the cost of existing residential housing stock. With few exceptions, only the basic land use regulations have been considered in the analysis. Discretionary variances or special permits could lead to somewhat different results.

BUILD-OUT UNDER EXISTING ZONING

Under existing zoning there are 7 different zoning districts within the planning area (*Figure II.1.1*):

- SAV - South Acton Village District. Allows mixture of residential and nonresidential uses. Encompasses much of the area generally identified as South Acton Village. A maximum Floor Area Ratio (FAR = buildings floor area divided by land area of parcel upon which buildings are located) of 0.20 is the primary zoning limitation. There is also some limitation on the conversion of existing residential floor space to nonresidential floor space.
- GI - General Industrial District. No residences allowed. Maximum FAR 0.20.
- LI - Light Industrial District. No residences allowed. Maximum FAR 0.20.
- R2 - Residence 2 District. Single family residential zoning with a maximum density of one dwelling unit per 20000 square feet. Exceptions are available for accessory apartments and conversion of single family dwellings to multi-family dwellings (up to four units).
- R8/4 - Residence 8/4 District. Single family residential zoning with a maximum density of one dwelling unit per 80000 square feet. Exceptions are available for accessory apartments; conversion of single family dwellings to multi-family dwellings (up to four units); and cluster style developments, in which the density may increase to one dwelling unit per 40000 square feet in exchange for large areas preserved as open space.
- PCRC - Planned Conservation Residential Community District. Single or multifamily residential district with significant open space requirement. Maximum density in the PCRC district within the planning area is 1 dwelling unit per acre.
- ARC - Agriculture, Recreation, Conservation District. Municipal land mostly designated for active or passive recreational uses. No building activity permitted.

The existing zoning regulations in effect as of January 1, 1994 allow within the planning area an approximate total of 258,000 square feet of nonresidential building floor space (*Table III.8.1*). This represents a potential increase of 123,000 square feet over and above the existing level of 135,000 square feet. The number of residential dwelling units could be increased from currently 423 to 652, an increase of 229 units.

Under existing zoning, commercial floor area in the SAV, LI and GI zoning districts would be allowed to increase to more than twice the existing level, from currently 92611 square feet to 215568 square feet at build-out. This would coincide with a loss of one third of the existing residences inside the SAV District, from currently 36 to 24 at build-out, and the loss of two residences in the LI District. Almost all of the increase in dwelling units within the planning area would occur as single family homes in the neighborhoods surrounding South Acton Village.

Currently, there are 135277 square feet of non-residential floor area and 423 dwelling units within the Planning Area. The current ratio between non-residential floor area and dwelling units calculates to 320 s.f./ dwelling unit. In the event that build-out conditions are reached under current zoning regulations this ratio would increase to 396 s.f./ dwelling unit (258234 s.f. of all build-out non-residential floor area/ 652 all build-out dwelling units).

Table III.8.1

**Build-out Summary by Zoning District in Planning Area
Existing Zoning**

ZONING DISTRICTS	SAV	GI	LI	SAV+ GI + LI	R2	R8/4	PCRC	R2 + R8/4 + PCRC	ARC	ALL
ACRES	13.7	6.4	21.7	41.8	306.6	95.2	71.2	473.1	103.8	618.7
EXIST. TOTAL FLOOR AREA ¹	75102	19794	40372	135268	28090 ²	11143 ²	3433 ²	42666	0	177934
EXIST. NON-RESIDENTIAL FLOOR AREA ¹	35773	19794	37044	92611	28090	11143	3433	42666	0	135277
BUILD-OUT TOTAL FLOOR AREA ¹	115273	47220	80578	243071	28090 ³	11143 ³	3433	42666	0	285737
BUILD-OUT NON-RESIDENTIAL FLOOR AREA ¹	87770	47220	80578	215568	28090 ³	11143 ³	3433	42666	0	258234
EXISTING DWELLING UNITS	36	0	2	38	339	6	40	385	0	423
BUILD-OUT DWELLING UNITS	24	0	0 ⁴	24	506	52	70	628	0	652

¹ NET FLOOR AREA IN SQUARE FEET

² NONRESIDENTIAL FLOOR AREA ONLY.

³ PREEXISTING NONCONFORMING NONRESIDENTIAL USES OCCUPYING FLOOR SPACE IN RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS ARE ASSUMED TO REMAIN.

⁴ PREEXISTING NONCONFORMING RESIDENTIAL USES IN NONRESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS ARE ASSUMED TO CONVERT TO CONFORMING USE

BUILD-OUT UNDER PROPOSED ZONING

Under the proposed Regulatory Plan only 6 zoning districts would remain within the planning area (see *Figure II.1.2*). The GI district and portions of the LI districts would be eliminated, with most of the affected parcels being absorbed into the SAV District and a few into the R2 District.

Some parcels currently zoned SAV would be changed to R2 and vice versa. In the end result, the SAV district area would be larger than under existing zoning. The overall area designated for nonresidential or mixed uses would also slightly increase from approximately 41.8 acres to 42.6 acres (*Table III.8.2*). In addition, regulations affecting land use and density within the SAV District would be substantially revised under the proposed Regulatory Plan. A mixture of residential and nonresidential uses would be encourage with the goal of raising the number of residences over existing levels. The maximum Floor Area Ratio (FAR = buildings floor area divided by land area of parcel upon which buildings are located), which would be the primary zoning limitation, could be increased to 0.40, whereby one quarter of the floor area must be dedicated to residential uses. Regulations in the LI, R2, R8/4, PCRC and ARC Districts would remain unchanged. *Table III.8.2* shows that these proposed changes would allow within the planning area a total of 321574 square feet of nonresidential building floor space. This represents a potential increase of 186297 square feet over and above the existing 135277 square feet, and 63340 square feet more than at build-out under existing zoning. The number of residential dwelling units could be increased from currently 423 to 704, an increase of 281 units, and 52 units more than under existing zoning. Most of the increase in potential dwelling units over existing zoning build-out would occur in or near South Acton Village itself. In comparison to the current ratio between non-residential floor area and dwelling units within the Planning Area of 320 s.f./ dwelling unit, the build-out ratio under proposed zoning would increase to 456 s.f./ dwelling unit (321574 s.f. of all build-out non-residential floor area/ 704 all build-out dwelling units).

Table III.8.2
Build-out Summary by Zoning District in Planning Area
Proposed Zoning

ZONING DISTRICTS	SAV	LI	R2	R8/4	PCRC	R2 + R8/4 + PCRC	ARC	ALL
ACRES	28	9	311.4	95.2	71.2	481.3	103.8	618.7
EXIST. TOTAL FLOOR AREA ¹	104773	16850	29957 ²	11143 ²	3433 ²	61383	0	166156
EXISTING NON-RESIDENTIAL FLOOR AREA ¹	73894	16850	29957	11143	3433	61383	0	135277
BUILD-OUT TOTAL FLOOR AREA ¹	303983	45600	29957 ³	11143 ³	3433	61383	0	394116
BUILD-OUT NONRESIDENTIAL FLOOR AREA ¹	231441	45600	29957 ³	11143 ³	3433	61383	0	321574
EXISTING DWELLING UNITS	34	0	343	6	40	389	0	423
BUILD-OUT DWELLING UNITS	69	0	513	52	70	642	0	704

¹ NET FLOOR AREA IN SQUARE FEET

² NONRESIDENTIAL FLOOR AREA ONLY.

³ PREEXISTING NONCONFORMING NONRESIDENTIAL USES OCCUPYING FLOOR SPACE IN RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS ARE ASSUMED TO REMAIN.

⁴ PREEXISTING NONCONFORMING RESIDENTIAL USES IN NONRESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS ARE ASSUMED TO CONVERT TO CONFORMING USE

SECTION 9.

PROPERTY VALUATIONS UNDER BUILD-OUT CONDITIONS

The South Acton Village Plan recommends zoning changes which, under build-out conditions, would result in a different estimated total valuation of real property in the Planning Area than the total valuation estimated for build-out conditions under existing zoning. The Plan proposes to expand the size of the South Acton Village (SAV) District mostly by incorporation of several parcels currently zoned for industrial uses (GI & LI), of the commuter parking lot parcel and a few other parcels currently zoned residential (R-2). Some other properties would change from SAV and LI to R-2. The allowable floor area ratio in the revised South Acton Village District would increase.

The South Acton Village Planning Area contains 446 parcels with a total 1993 property valuation of \$71,429,117.00. 331 parcels are in residential use (tax class codes 01_, 101-112) with a total of 423 dwelling units and a total valuation of \$63,015,717.00. The average valuation per dwelling unit is \$148,973.33. 17 parcels are in commercial or industrial use (tax class codes 03_, 300-389 & 400-433). They contain 90855 square feet of building floor area and are valued at a total of \$4,508,400.00. The average per square foot valuation is \$48.81. The valuation of undeveloped property (tax class codes 130-132, 2__, 39X, 44_) and agricultural property amounts to a \$3,905,000.00. Tax exempt parcels (tax class code 9__) do not contribute to the tax base.

To estimate the potential change of property valuation in the South Acton Village Planning Area at the time of build-out conditions due to the proposed zoning changes, the current per dwelling unit and per square foot valuations were applied to 34 parcels for build-out conditions under existing zoning and proposed zoning. It was found that the proposed zoning changes would directly affected the build-out valuation of only these 34 parcels, which make up less than 10% of the total current valuation within the Planning Area. The estimated valuation changes of these parcels represent the Planning Area changes which are solely attributable to the proposed changes in the zoning bylaw. Other valuation changes will occur within the Planning Area primarily due to new home construction or inflation, but these changes will not be the direct result of any proposed zoning changes. For the purpose of this analysis, it was assumed that current assessment practices would not change and that no change of the average per unit or per square foot valuations would occur.

The current total valuation of the affected parcels is \$5,969,500 (*Table III.9.1*). This value is composed of approximately 46% commercial and industrial valuation, 51% residential valuation and 3% valuation of vacant land. In the event that build-out conditions should be reached under existing zoning regulations, the total valuation of the affected parcels, would increase to \$10,893,753. The residential real estate portion would be valued at approximately 38% of the

total. The commercial and industrial real estate portion would contribute approximately 62%. For build-out conditions under the proposed zoning changes the total valuation of the affected parcels is expected to increase by a factor greater than three to \$20,461,917. The residential portion and the commercial/industrial portion would contribute approximately 53% and 47% respectively. The ratio between the residential and the commercial/industrial valuation would then be slightly above the ratio as it exists today.

Table III.9.1
Proposed Zoning Changes
Estimated Changes in Valuation of 37 Affected Parcels

	TOTAL VALUATION	RESIDENTIAL VALUATION	COMMERCIAL VALUATION
Existing (1993)	\$5,969,500.00	\$3,037,100.00	\$2,762,300.00
Current Zoning Build-Out	\$10,893,753.00	\$4,171,251.00	\$6,722,502.00
Proposed Zoning Build-out	\$20,461,917.00	\$10,875,049.00	\$9,586,868.00

PART VI
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PROPOSED ZONING ARTICLES

The following zoning articles may be subject to change as a result of further review, public hearings and Town Meeting action.

SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE PLAN ZONING ARTICLE ____ - SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE DISTRICT BOUNDARIES (2/3 Vote required)

To see if the Town of Acton will vote to amend the Zoning Map as follows:

(Present Zoning Designations, shown in parenthesis, and street addresses are listed for reference purposes only.)

A. Rezone to South Acton Village (SAV) the following parcels of land identified by their map and parcel number as shown in the 1994 Town Atlas:

Map G-2A,	Parcel 74 (R-2)	10 Central Street
Map H-2A,	Parcel 3 (R-2)	140 Main Street
Map H-2A,	Parcel 11 (R-2, SAV)	131 Main Street
Map H-2A,	Parcel 37 (GI)	25 Maple Street
Map H-2A,	Parcel 42 (GI)	11 Maple Street
Map H-2A,	Parcel 42-1 (GI)	1 Maple Street
Map H-2A,	Parcel 46 (R-2, SAV)	26 School Street
Map H-2A,	Parcel 57 (GI)	113 Main Street
Map H-2A,	Parcel 64 (GI)	4 High Street
Map H-3,	Parcel 138 (LI)	81 River Street
Map H-3A,	Parcel 38 (LI, SAV)	7 River Street
Map H-3A,	Parcel 38-1 (LI, SAV)	7 River Street (rear)
Map H-3A,	Parcel 39 (LI)	11 River Street
Map H-3A,	Parcel 47 (LI)	53 River Street
Map H-3A,	Parcel 48 (LI)	65 River Street

B. Rezone to Residence 2 (R-2) the following parcels of land identified by their map and parcel number as shown in the 1994 Town Atlas:

Map H-2A,	Parcel 58 (LI)	30 Stow Street
Map H-2A,	Parcel 58-1 (LI)	30 Stow Street (rear)
Map H-2A,	Parcel 59 (LI)	24 Stow Street

Map H-3A,	Parcel 1 (R-2, SAV)	34 School Street
Map H-3A,	Parcel 1-2 (R-2, SAV)	40 School Street (rear)
Map H-3A,	Parcel 8 (SAV)	30 School Street
Map H-3A,	Parcel 9 (SAV)	40 School Street
Map H-3A,	Parcel 10(R-2, SAV)	48 School Street

SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE PLAN ZONING ARTICLE___ - SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE USE REGULATIONS (2/3 vote required)

To see if the Town of Acton will vote to amend the Zoning Bylaw, Section 3 as follows:

- A. Table of Principal Uses.** Delete the SAV column under the heading for Village Districts and replace it with the following new SAV column:

(For reference purposes, the present designation is shown in brackets where changes are proposed in this article.)

	PRINCIPAL USE	VILLAGE DISTRICTS SAV	
3.2	GENERAL USES		
3.2.1	Agriculture	Y	
3.2.2	Conservation	Y	
3.2.3	Earth Removal	N	[SPA]
3.2.4	Recreation	Y	
3.3	RESIDENTIAL USES		
3.3.1	Single Family Dwelling	Y	
3.3.2	Single Family Dwelling with Apartment	Y	[Y (3)]
3.3.3	Dwelling Conversions	Y	[SPA]
3.3.4	Multifamily Dwelling	Y(7)	[N]
3.4	GOVERNMENTAL, INSTITUTIONAL AND PUBLIC SERVICE USES		
3.4.1	Municipal	Y	
3.4.2	Educational	Y	

3.4.3	Religious	Y	
3.4.4	Nursing Home	SPS	
3.4.5	Public or Private Utility Facilities	Y	
3.4.6	Child Care Facility	Y	
3.5	BUSINESS USES		
3.5.1	Retail Store	Y	
3.5.2	Business or Professional Office	Y	
3.5.3	Financial	Y	
3.5.4	Restaurant	SPS	
3.5.5	Hotel, Inn or Motel	SPS	
3.5.6	Combined Business and Dwelling	Y	[SPS]
3.5.7	Lodge or Club	SPS	[Y]
3.5.8	Funeral Home	Y	
3.5.9	Veterinary Care	SPS	[N]
3.5.10	Commercial Kennel	N	
3.5.11	Personal Services	Y	
3.5.12	General Services	Y	
3.5.13	Studio	Y	
3.5.14	Building Trade Shop	Y	
3.5.15	Commercial Recreation	SPS	
3.5.16	Commercial and Trade School	SPS	
3.5.17	Amusement Facility	SPS	[N]
3.5.18	Motor Vehicle Service Station or Car Wash	N	[SPS]
3.5.19	Motor Vehicle Repair or Body Shop	N	
3.5.20	Light Vehicular and Equipment Sales	N	
3.5.21	Parking Facility	N	[Y]
3.6	INDUSTRIAL USES		
3.6.1	Warehouse	N	
3.6.2	Mini-Warehouse	N	
3.6.3	Construction Yard	N	
3.6.4	Lumber Yard	N	
3.6.5	Heating Fuel Sales and Service	N	
3.6.6	Light Manufacturing	SPS	

3.7	PROHIBITED USES	
3.7.1	Heavy Manufacturing	N
3.7.2	Storage	N
3.7.3	Amusement	N
3.7.4	General	N
3.7.5	Heavy Vehicular Sales or Repair Garages	N

- B. In Section 3.3.3, last sentence, replace the words "in the WAV District" with the following new words:

"in the WAV and SAV Districts."

- C. Delete the second sentence of Section 3.5.5 and replace with a new sentence as follows:

"A hotel, inn or motel, including a bed & breakfast accommodation in the NAV, EAV and WAV Districts shall have not more than five (5) guest rooms, and in the SAV District not more than eight (8) guest rooms."

- D. Delete the second and third sentence of Section 3.5.6.

- E. Add at the end Section 3.5.17 the following:

"In the SAV District, only cinemas, theaters or performing arts shall be allowed."

SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE PLAN ZONING ARTICLE ____ - SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE DIMENSIONAL REGULATIONS (2/3 vote required)

To see if the Town of Acton will vote to amend the Zoning Bylaw, Section 5 as follows:

- A. Amend the Table of Standard Dimensional Regulations as follows:

1. Amend the line for SAV to read as follows:

(For reference purposes, the present designations are shown in brackets.)

South Acton Village Plan

Zoning Districts	Minimum Lot Area in sq. ft.	Minimum Lot Frontage in feet	Minimum Lot Width in feet	Minimum Front Yard in feet	Minimum Side & Rear Yard in feet	Minimum Open Space in percent	Maximum Floor Area Ratio	Maximum Height in feet
SAV	NR	NR	NR	10 (10)	10	NR	.20(13)	36(12)
	[10,000]	[100]	[50]	[30]	[30]	[35%]	[.20]	[36]

2. Delete the first sentence in footnote (10) and replace with a new sentence as follows:

"The maximum front yard shall be ten feet (10') in the WAV District and twenty feet (20') in the SAV District, or the lesser of the front yards of the two BUILDINGS or STRUCTURES on either side, whichever is the least."

3. Delete the words "In the West Acton Village" from footnote (12).
4. Add a new footnote (13) as follows:

(13) The Maximum Floor Area Ratio (FAR) may be increased to .40, provided that for every square foot of non-residential NET FLOOR AREA built above FAR of .20 an equal amount or more of habitable residential NET FLOOR AREA is provided simultaneously.

B. Amend Section 5.5.2 as follows:

1. Delete the SAV column in the table and replace with the following new column:

(For reference purposes, the present maximum is shown in brackets where changes are proposed.)

PRINCIPAL USES		VILLAGE DISTRICTS SAV	
3.5.1	Retail Store	3,000	[5,000]
3.5.2	Business or Professional Office	3,000	[5,000]
3.5.3	Financial	3,000	[5,000]
3.5.4	Restaurant	5,000	
3.5.7	Lodge or Club	5,000	[NR]
3.5.9	Veterinary Care	3,000	[NR]
3.5.11	Personal Services	3,000	

3.5.12	General Services	3,000
3.5.13	Studio	NR
3.5.14	Building Trade Shop	5,000
3.5.17	Amusement facility	NR
3.6.6	Light Manufacturing	5,000

2. Delete the lines, which read as follows, from the end of the table:

Total area of all residential, business, and/or industrial USES on a LOT	8,000	NR	NR	NR
---	-------	----	----	----

SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE PLAN ZONING ARTICLE ____ - PARKING IN THE SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE DISTRICT (2/3 vote required)

To see if the Town of Acton will vote to amend Section 6 of the Zoning Bylaw as follows:

- A. In Section 6.4, delete the words "Except in the WAV District," and replace with the following new words:

Except in the WAV and SAV Districts,

- B. Delete the first paragraph of Section 6.7 and replace it with the following new paragraph:

6.7 All parking lots shall be designed in compliance with the following standards. These standards shall not apply to parking lots in the WAV and SAV Districts, parking lots serving a single or two FAMILY residential USE, parking lots serving a religious USE, and parking lots for up to 15 parking spaces serving a conservation USE.

- C. In Section 6.8 delete the words "Except in the SAV District," and replace with the following new words:

Except in the WAV and SAV Districts,

and add at the end of the Section the following:

In the SAV District, structured parking shall only be allowed if incorporated in a

BUILDING occupied with other USES. A separate detached parking STRUCTURES shall only be permitted if it qualifies as a municipal USE.

- D. In Sections 6.9.1, 6.9.1.1 and 6.9.1.2 delete the word "SAV,".
- E. In Section 6.9.2, insert at the beginning of the first paragraph the following words:
- WAV and SAV Districts -
- and delete the words "In the WAV Districts" and replace them with the following new words:
- In the WAV and SAV Districts,
- F. Delete Section 6.9.2.1 and replace with the following new Section 6.9.2.1:
- 6.9.2.1 Required off-STREET parking for a USE may be provided on any LOT within the same Zoning District as the USE, but not necessarily on the same LOT as the USE.
- G. In Section 6.9.2.2, delete the words "In the WAV District,".
- H. In Section 6.9.2.3, delete the words "In the WAV District," in both locations where they occur, and insert in the place where they occur the second time the following new words:
- in the same Zoning District,
- I. In Section 6.9.2.4, delete the words "In the WAV District,".
- J. In Section 6.9.2.5 delete the words "In the WAV District," and the words "throughout the WAV District" and replace the latter with the following new words:
- throughout the same Zoning District
- K. In Sections 6.9.2.6 and 6.9.2.7, delete the words "in the WAV District".

SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE PLAN ZONING ARTICLE ____ - SITE PLAN SPECIAL PERMIT IN THE SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE DISTRICT (2/3 vote required)

To see if the Town of Acton will vote to amend Section 10 of the Zoning Bylaw as follows:

A. In Section 10.4.1.1, delete the words "In the WAV District," and replace with:

"In the WAV and SAV Districts,"

B. Delete Section 10.4.3.9 and replace the following new section 10.4.3.9:

10.4.3.9 Special Provisions Applicable to the WAV and SAV Districts - In the WAV and SAV Districts, the design and placement of BUILDINGS, STRUCTURES and other site improvements shall be carefully considered to ensure the retention and enhancement of the village character and environment. Proposed BUILDINGS and STRUCTURES shall be related harmoniously to the terrain and to the scale and architecture of existing BUILDINGS in the village that have a functional or visual relationship to the proposed BUILDINGS or STRUCTURES. Proposed BUILDINGS and STRUCTURES shall be compatible with their surroundings with respect to: height; facade facing the STREET; rhythm of solid surfaces and openings; spacing of BUILDINGS or STRUCTURES; roof slopes; and scale. To minimize the impact of mechanical equipment on the village environment and character, window air-conditioning units, condenser elements, and heating units shall not be located on the front facades. A certificate issued by the Acton Historic District Commission for development activity proposed on a LOT that is located within a Local Historic District shall be deemed to satisfy this section.

SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE ZONING ARTICLE ____ - CONTINUANCE OF ZONING COMPLIANCE FOLLOWING MUNICIPAL ACQUISITION AND USE (2/3 vote required)

To see if the Town of Acton will vote to amend Section 8 of the Zoning Bylaw by inserting the following new sub-section 8.8 as follows:

8.8 A LOT, parcel, TRACT OF LAND or STRUCTURE, whose area, FRONTAGE width or other measurement is reduced by a taking or acquisition by the Town of Acton and the establishment of a municipal USE on the land taken or acquired by the Town of Acton, shall not be deemed to fall into non-compliance with this Bylaw for that reason alone.

APPENDIX B

SURVEY SUMMARY

1. PRESS RELEASE

South Acton Village Planning Committee Releases Resident Survey Results

In January of 1992, Acton's Planning Board formed the South Acton Village Planning Committee (SAVPC) to formally write and implement a Planning document for the South Acton Village District. This plan is primarily a "blueprint" for improvements to the village district which will encourage future development that is compatible with existing residences, business and infrastructure.

One of the Committee's goals is to ensure that public input and suggestions are incorporated into the plan as it is written. With this in mind, the South Acton Village Planning Committee mailed comprehensive survey forms to almost 1,900 households in the South Acton area in the Spring of 1992. "The survey return rate was overwhelming, and it took almost seven months to compile and summarize the results", said Town Planner Roland Bartl. "We received a return rate of 17.5% which is more than double the average response expected from direct mail surveys. This level of response is terrific and shows that residents in South Acton are interested in participating in shaping the future of South Acton Village", Bartl said.

Responding to a question to identify the greatest assets of South Acton Village, 54% named "village charm", historic character and buildings. Thirty-four percent (34%) identified the commuter train station as another significant asset.

The most identifiable landmarks in South Acton were reported as Exchange Hall, the train station, Music store and Jones Tavern. Exchange Hall was also on top of the list of buildings to preserve, followed by other old/historic buildings in general, Jones Tavern and the Faulkner House.

The survey also asked "what in South Acton Village should be changed?" 78% of respondents indicated that they would like to see a general clean up the area as well as better maintenance of buildings and yards. 34% mentioned traffic improvements, 23% singled out the Main Street Bridge whereby some felt it should be repaired, others said it should be replaced and a few respondents felt that an "at grade" crossing would be best. Respondents also stated the need for more and better sidewalks, more stores and business activity and more parking.

Touching upon one of the most critical issues facing South Acton, the survey stated that in light

of the failure to realize the sewer project approved by voters 5 years ago, "a smaller and partial solution could improve the current septic system problems in South Acton Village itself to help the village center's ability to serve as a neighborhood business area. This would involve the construction of a much smaller collection system with a treatment plant and ground (subsurface) disposal site near the village." The survey advised that under such a scenario, the area served would form a separate sewer district, and that the cost to the individual user may be relatively high. The survey asked whether such a smaller sewer option should be pursued further and a narrow majority of households gave their support 43%, to 41% with 16% undecided. However, many of those who expressed support were concerned about the costs. Households within the Village itself signaled their support 57% to 21%, with 21% expressing no opinion.

Commuter parking was another topic in the survey and 60% of the respondents stated that the current commuter lot should be expanded to meet future demand, while 28% disagreed with expansion. The possibility of building a parking garage was presented and respondents seemed to split almost 50% to 50% for and against the idea.

The survey also asked for suggestions on new business in South Acton. Responses reported that video rental, gift shop, convenience store, restaurant, carry out food, and a liquor store were the types of businesses which would be appropriate for South Acton Village.

William H. "Trey" Shupert, Vice Chair of the Acton Planning Board and the Chair of SAVPC, said that "the Music Store and Erikson's Grain and Feed Store prove that businesses can be profitable in South Acton. It is our hope that we can create a realistic Village plan that will encourage more small businesses to open in South Acton".

The South Acton Village Planning Committee meets the second and fourth Tuesday of each month in room 126 of the Acton Town Hall. These meetings are open to the public and interested residents are invited to attend.

2. SURVEY RESULTS - SUMMARY

333 Returns were received from Respondents from all of South Acton.

1898 surveys were mailed to all households within the area shown in *Figure III.1.2*.

Return rate is **17.54%**.

The survey asked the following questions. Answers are tabulated for each question. The answers to questions 7. are not shown here because their display would far exceed the size of this page layout. They may be viewed at the Acton Planning Department.

1. Where do you consider your residence to be located?

279 (83.8%)	South Acton		
9 (2.7%)	West Acton		
32 (9.6%)	Other	13 (3.9%)	No answer

2. When you and members of your household think of South Acton Village, what buildings, landmarks, historic elements, vistas, businesses or other characteristics first come to your mind? (Respondents could give more than one answer)

TOP 10:	203 (67.2%)	Exchange Hall.
	129 (42.7%)	Train Station.
	96 (31.8%)	Music Store.
	88 (29.1%)	Jones Tavern.
	65 (21.5%)	Erikson's Grain Mill.
	56 (18.5%)	Faulkner House.
	53 (17.5%)	Bridge.
	45 (14.9%)	South Acton Congregational Church.
	42 (13.9%)	Old historic houses/buildings.
	24 (7.9%)	Fort Pond Brook, Mill Pond, Mill Dam.
	31	No answer

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3. How would the majority of the members of your household rate South Acton Village for the following? (Respondents were asked to circle one rating in each category.)

	good	fair	poor	don't know	no answer
Attractiveness of buildings	25 (8.7%)	113 (39.5%)	146 (51%)	2 (0.7%)	47
Attractiveness of yards/public spaces	19 (6.7%)	149 (52.8%)	109 (38.7%)	5 (1.8%)	51
Cleanliness	40 (13.7%)	168 (57.7%)	78 (26.8%)	5 (1.7%)	42
Safety	36 (12.8%)	104 (37%)	131 (46.6%)	10 (3.6%)	52
Pedestrian convenience	20 (7.1%)	77 (27.3%)	171 (60.6%)	14 (5%)	51
Parking convenience	39 (13.4%)	96 (33.1%)	145 (50%)	10 (3.4%)	43
Automobile traffic flow	17 (6.1%)	89 (31.8%)	165 (58.9%)	9 (3.2%)	53
Shopping hours	47 (17.9%)	69 (26.3%)	44 (16.8%)	102 (38.9%)	71
Variety of goods & services	22 (8.1%)	56 (20.5%)	168 (61.5%)	27 (9.9%)	60
Quality of goods & services	56 (22.4%)	84 (33.6%)	43 (17.2%)	67 (26.8%)	83
Friendliness of mer- chants/bus. people	103 (41.2%)	49 (19.6%)	15 (6%)	83 (33.2%)	83
As a place to live in	95 (36%)	93 (35.2%)	52 (19.7%)	24 (9.1%)	69

4. In your opinion and in the opinion of the members of your household, what in South Acton Village is most worthy of preservation? (Respondents could give more than one answer)

TOP 10:	188 (64.6%)	Exchange Hall.
	71 (24.2%)	Old/historical buildings/houses.
	62 (21.3%)	Jones Tavern.
	41 (14.1%)	Faulkner House.
	30 (10.3%)	Train station.
	29 (10%)	Acton Music Center building.
	25 (8.6%)	Erikson's Grain Mill.
	24 (8.2%)	Village character/atmosphere/quaintness, historic feeling.
	22 (7.6%)	Mill Pond/dam (Erikson Dam)/Fort Pond Brook.
	17 (5.8%)	Open land/ Conservation land/ Farm land/ Park land.
	42	No answer

5. In your opinion and in the opinion of the members of your household, what in South Acton Village should be changed? (Respondents could give more than one answer)

TOP 10:	221 (78.1%)	Fix up/clean up/repair/maintain/renovate/paint buildings, yards, properties, area (Most mention Exchange Hall and old depot site; also Civil Defense Building, clean up School Street Garage, deserted storage areas, shabby houses).
	95 (33.6%)	Improve traffic flow/safety (most refer to School/Main Streets - signalize, is dangerous, reduce speed, improve visibility).
	64 (22.6%)	Repair/replace/eliminate bridge.
	42 (14.8%)	More sidewalks/improve pedestrian access, pedestrian crossings.
	31 (10.6%)	More shops, better variety of stores/appropriate stores/small businesses/cafe'/restaurant, add attractive commercial buildings, increase level of use of commercial buildings.
	22 (7.8%)	More parking.
	18 (6.4%)	Install sewers.
	9 (3.2%)	Tear down old/decrepit buildings.
	6 (2.1%)	Limit/ eliminate businesses (residential only).
	4 (1.4%)	(each) Create gathering place/park in village; Eliminate industry along River Street; Shut down automobile repair and body shops; no change/ change nothing.
	50	No answer

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6. How often do members of your household come to South Acton Village for the following? Include under services any medical, financial, instructional, auto repair, hair dressing and other professional or general services. (Respondents were asked to check one answer in each category.)

	shopping	services	transit use	other (live here, walking, museums, church, etc.)
Three or more times a week	26 (9.2%)	11 (4.4%)	54 (20.2%)	12
Once or twice a week	24 (8.5%)	13 (5.2%)	9 (3.4%)	4
Three or more times a month	15 (5.3%)	4 (1.6%)	14 (5.2%)	4
Once or twice a month	34 (12%)	29 (11.6%)	24 (9%)	4
Less than once a month	72 (25.3%)	69 (27.5%)	101 (37.8%)	2
Never	112 (39.6%)	125 (49.8%)	65 (24.3%)	31
No answer	50	82	66	276

7. Where does your household usually shop for the following?

Table of responses available in the Acton Planning Department.

8. In your opinion and in the opinion of the members of your household, what are the greatest assets of South Acton Village? (Respondents could give more than one answer)

TOP 10:	151 (53.5%)	Historic character/atmosphere, village charm/character, history, historic buildings, architecture.
	95 (33.7%)	Commuter rail/train station.
	52 (18.4%)	Open space, recreation area/fields, conservation land, feeling of country/rural.
	29 (10.3%)	None, nothing, not until it looks better - lost them.
	28 (9.9%)	Convenience/location.
	27 (9.6%)	Good neighbors/neighborhood/atmosphere, Good friends/people, Sense of community/place, small/quiet/safe neighborhoods, residential atmosphere.
	17 (6%)	Its potential.
	14 (5%)	Brook, Mill Pond, streams & ponds, water resources.
	10 (3.5%)	Erikson's Mill.
	9 (3.2%)	Museums.
	51	No answer

9. In your opinion and in the opinion of the members of your household, what are the greatest drawbacks for South Acton Village? (Respondents could give more than one answer)

TOP 10:

135 (46.7%)	Run-down/shabby appearance of area and buildings/old buildings (often mentioned is Main Street from Erikson's to Central Street including bridge, and beginning of School Street; lack of building utilization, tacky, unattractive, the whole thing, commercial/industrial look, needs civic pride, needs more attention to village attractiveness and less to streets and snow removal, most deserted area in Acton, ignored by the rest of Acton).
132 (45.7%)	Traffic (too much, congestion, hazards, flow, dangerous intersection).
60 (20.8%)	No/not enough business/activities/services, build new stores on old depot land, lack of shopping, needs coffee shop.
49 (17%)	Not enough parking.
28 (9.7%)	No/not enough sidewalks, bad pedestrian convenience/safety/access, hard to get around in and cross streets.
26 (9%)	No sewers.
24 (8.3%)	Bridge.
8 (2.8%)	Not a true village (lacks distinction, needs businesses, fences, lighting, benches, park, fountain, plantings etc.).
7 (2.4%)	Too much/destructive construction & development activity.
5 (1.7%)	Train whistles; Train Station/ Commuter Lot/ Commuters.
44	No answer

10. The inadequacy and failures of many individual septic systems combined with the low suitability of the soils to function as septic filters have probably been the single most important limitation on the continued vitality of South Acton Village as a neighborhood center for business, commercial and social activities. In the late 1980's Acton approved the construction of a sewer system serving the South Acton Village, a number of surrounding neighborhoods and Kelley's Corner to the north. The project relied on federal funding for most of its construction cost. So far, lack of funding has delayed this sewer project indefinitely. A small and partial solution could improve the situation in South Acton Village itself to help improve its ability to serve as a neighborhood business area. This would be the construction of a much smaller sewer system, with a treatment plant and ground disposal site near the village. The area served would be incorporated into a sewer district. At that smaller level it may never be able to attract federal funds or any other outside subsidies. This may result in an increased cost to the users within the sewer district. In the opinion of the majority of the members of your household, should the establishment of a small sewer district servicing only South Acton Village be pursued

further? (please circle your answer)

Yes 130 (42.8%) No 125 (41.1%) No opinion 49 (16.1%) No answer 29

11. The existence of the public transit station in South Acton Village could be regarded as a mixed blessing. On one hand, it attracts significant car traffic to and from the commuter parking lot, particularly during rush hour when streets are already congested. On the other hand, this additional traffic brings additional people from other parts of Acton and from other towns to South Acton Village. They can be regarded as a potential pool of customers to South Acton businesses assisting in any revitalization effort. The MBTA, operator of the commuter rail to Boston, estimates future ridership increases to create parking demands far in excess of the available parking capacity.

- 11.a) Does the majority of the members of your household think that the parking capacity at the South Acton commuter lot should be increased to meet future demand? (please circle your answer)

Yes 189 (60.2%) No 89 (28.3%) No opinion 36 (11.5%) No answer 19

- 11.b) Does the majority of the members of your household think that business activity in and around the commuter parking lot should be encouraged? (please circle your answer)

Yes 164 (52.6%) No 114 (36.5%) No opinion 34 (10.9%) No answer 21

- 11.c) As a long term option, the commuter parking lot could be replaced by a parking garage that would also provide space for some new businesses. How does the majority of the members of your household feel about this idea? (please circle your answer)

Good idea - should be pursued as an option for future growth.	137 (44.5%)
Not a good idea - should not be pursued.	145 (47.1%)
No opinion.	26 (8.4%)
No answer	25

12. There are several conservation areas in the vicinity of South Acton Village, the largest and most easily accessible for hiking and walking is the Great Hill Conservation Area. There are also two ball fields/playgrounds near by, the Jones Field at the corner of Stow and Martin Streets, and the field at the Great Hill conservation area behind the South

Acton fire station which also features a parking lot and a skating pond.

A significant natural resource that could be utilized at least in part for recreation purposes is Fort Pond Brook which flows through the middle of South Acton Village, and with it Mill Pond, a dammed segment of Fort Pond Brook just southwest of the village. Currently this area is not utilized in part due to lack of public access and in part due to sewage pollution in South Acton Village.

- 12.a) What degree of importance does the majority of the members of your household assign to the clean up of Fort Pond Brook (elimination of polluting septic systems) and the development of a Fort Pond Brook/Mill Pond park and recreation area? (please circle your answer)

Very important	176 (56.1%)
Important, but only secondary to physical and commercial improvements in South Acton Village.	89 (28.3%)
Not important	33 (10.5%)
No opinion	16 (5.1%)
No answer	19

- 12.b) How often do you and members of your household visit the existing conservation and recreation areas to use? (Respondents were asked to check one answer in each category)

	trails	ball fields	playgrounds
3 or more times a week	19 (6.6%)	12 (4.9%)	12 (5%)
once or twice a week	17 (5.9%)	23 (9.3%)	19 (7.9%)
3 or more times a month	18 (6.3%)	13 (5.3%)	8 (3.3%)
once or twice a month	33 (11.5%)	20 (8.1%)	25 (10.3%)
less than once a month	112 (39.2%)	62 (25.2%)	57 (23.6%)
never	87 (30.4%)	116 (47.2%)	121 (50%)
No answer	47	87	91

- 12.c) What kinds of public recreational opportunities would you and members of your household like to see in South Acton Village and surrounding areas? (Respondents could give more than one answer)

TOP 10:	69 (27.4%)	A nice park/ recreation area with benches (along pond/river and River Street, clean, safe), public garden, picnic area with tables and grills, playground.
	61 (24.2%)	hiking, jogging, walking, cross country, exercise trails, paths (along old Maynard rail stub), sidewalks.
	32 (12.7%)	Bike trails, bike racks.
	29 (11.5%)	Swimming (pond, pool, beach).
	25 (9.9%)	Happy/ fine as is, not important, nothing, clean up/ maintain better what exists.
	22 (8.7%)	Boating, canoeing, fishing, boat launch for non-motor boats.
	16 (6.3%)	Ice Skating (1 on Mill Pond).
	14 (5.6%)	Ball fields (soccer, basketball, baseball, softball, little league, lawn bowling), improve drainage.
	13 (5.2%)	Tennis courts.
	9 (3.6%)	Clean Fort Pond Brook, better septage solution, septage first.
	81	No answer

13. One way to help stimulate neighborhood businesses in South Acton Village without contributing greatly to traffic congestion could be to encourage walking and bicycling to the village.

- 13.a) Where does your household reside in relation to South Acton Village? (see map on back of questionnaire; please circle your answer)

Within South Acton Village	14 (4.2%)
Within about one half mile of South Acton Village	128 (38.4%)
Beyond about one half mile from South Acton Village	177 (53.2%)
No answer	14 (4.2%)

13.b) How do you or members of your household usually go to South Acton Village?
(Respondents could give more than one answer)

walk	74 (24%)
bicycle	30 (9.7%)
automobile	253 (82.1%)
never go there	10 (3.2%)
no answer	25

13.c) What pedestrian and/or bicycle facility improvements would you or members of your household like to see, specifically what improvements would increase the convenience and safety of your and your household members' walk and/or bicycle ride to South Acton Village? (Respondents could give more than one answer)

TOP 8:	221 (81.5%)	Sidewalks/walk ways/bike ways/pedestrian connections & access (most streets were mentioned; also to train from Maple; wider walks; bike ways along Route 27, High, Central).
	55 (20.3%)	pedestrian and/or bicycle improvements are not important to any members of my household.
	31 (11.4%)	Improve/ signal Main/School St. intersection, also Central/Main.
	24 (8.9%)	Improve/maintain pedestrian cross walks on Route 27/ enforce crossing law.
	13 (4.8%)	Bike racks.
	11 (4.1%)	Improve bridge safety (fix it, get rid of it)/ improve safety of stairs at bridge.
	4 (1.5%)	(each) Widen roads; Enforce/ reduce speed limits.
	2 (0.7%)	Provide pedestrian lighting.
	62	No answer

14. Would your household be capable and willing to pay through taxes or special assessments for the following improvements in and around South Acton Village? (Respondents could give more than one answer)

Sewer construction	131 (45.8%)	
Pedestrian/bicycle improvements	156 (54.5%)	
Roadway improvements (incl. traffic light)	133 (46.5%)	
Public parking lots	53 (18.5%)	
Expanding conservation/recreation/park areas	125 (43.7%)	
Other, please specify below:	22 (7.7%)	Maintain hist. buildings; Clean up/ maintenance; Get rid of/ replace bridge; Speed bumps; Playground; Band stand; Truck exclusion.
No	34 (11.9%)	
No answer	47	

15. Research has shown that age, income level and other factors influences how people view their neighborhood and neighborhood business area. To help us understand and evaluate the survey results more accurately, please answer the following questions. Your answers to the entire questionnaire will be kept completely confidential.

- 15.a) Please indicate your age and the age of your household members (by circling the numbers correlating to the age group)

Age group

0 - 4	68 (6.8%)
5 - 17	200 (19.9%)
18 - 24	69 (6.9%)
25 - 49	452 (45%)
50 - 65	147 (14.6%)
65 +	69 (6.9%)
No answer	12

15.b) Please indicate the total annual gross income of your household (circle applicable income range).

over \$75,000	136 (48.6%)
\$50,000 - \$75,000	66 (23.6%)
\$30,000 - \$50,000	44 (15.7%)
\$20,000 - \$30,000	17 (6.1%)
\$15,000 - \$20,000	10 (3.6%)
\$10,000 - \$15,000	4 (1.4%)
under \$10,000	3 (1.1%)

No answer	53
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15.c) How long have you lived in South Acton Village or in the surrounding neighborhood?

> 50 years	13 (4.3%)
40 - 49 years	12 (3.9%)
30 - 39 years	14 (4.6%)
20 - 29 years	32 (10.5%)
10 - 19 years	94 (30.8%)
5 - 9 years	56 (18.4%)
1 - 4 years	74 (24.3%)
< 1 year	10 (3.3%)

No answer	28
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15.d) How long do you plan on living in South Acton Village or in the surrounding neighborhoods?

< 2 years	8 (2.6%)
2 - 4 years	18 (6%)
5 - 9 years	30 (9.9%)
> 10 years, don't know, indefinitely, many years, etc.	246 (81.5%)

No answer	31
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15.e) Do you own or rent your home? (please circle your answer)

own	300 (92.3%)
rent	25 (7.7%)
no answer	8

16. Do you attend Acton Town Meetings? (please circle your answer)

Always	35 (11.4%)
Sometimes	214 (69.5%)
Never	59 (19.2%)
No answer	25

APPENDIX C

JUNE 10, 1992 PUBLIC MEETING

On June 10, 1992 the South Acton Village Planning Committee invited South Acton residents to a public meeting in the South Acton Congregational Church at 31 School Street. The meeting had been publicized widely through newspaper announcements and on the cover of over 1900 survey forms which had been mailed or otherwise distributed several weeks in advance. Approximately fifty residents attended the meeting. The focus of the meeting was to receive public input into the South Acton Village planning process. The input received at this meeting, together with the results from the returned survey forms will provide the basis for the draft of planning goals and objectives and recommended actions and priorities. To facilitate public comments and the sharing of ideas, the meeting provided two consecutive 1 hour workshop session. During each session workshops were held on the following subject areas: Development & Growth; Traffic & Transportation; Open Space, Recreation & Conservation; Village Character & Preservation. Workshop groups counted 8-12 participants including a volunteer facilitator and a volunteer recorder. Participants were assigned to a workshop during the first session. For the second session meeting participants could choose which workshop to attend.

Facilitators were asked to follow a workshop agenda outlined by a sheet of lead questions and allowing about 10 minutes at the end of each workshop for very general comments. The following is a compilation of the volunteer recorder's notes by workshop subject area, each preceded by list of lead questions.

Subject Area: Development and Growth

Questions:

1. What do you think of the types of businesses in South Acton Village and its vicinity, their variety, location and services?
2. What are the attractions of South Acton Village businesses? What are the problems? What things could be improved with South Acton Village businesses?
3. What do you think of the level of business activity in South Acton Village and vicinity? Too little, too much, about right?
4. In general, what kinds of businesses should be encouraged in South Acton Village and vicinity and what kinds of businesses should be discouraged?
5. Of the following land uses, which ones should be encouraged and which ones should be discouraged in South Acton Village and its surrounding neighborhoods? If encouraged, under what circumstances? Business & Industry: retail shops, shopping centers, professional offices, general & professional services (i.e. dry cleaning, laundromat,

funeral home, bank, barber shop, travel agency, doctor's office, veterinarian), gas station, car wash, automobile repair, light manufacturing (i.e. fabrication/ assembly of tools, electronic equipment, instruments, building components, metal products, hardware, office supplies), warehouses, personal storage warehouses (mini-warehouses), building trades (i.e. wood working, carpentry, plumbing), cottage industries/home occupations, other. Tourism/Entertainment: bed & breakfasts, restaurants, bars, fast food outlets, movie or stage theater, other. Recreation/ Athletic: sports/recreation facility, athletic/health clubs, other. Agriculture: farm with or without livestock, market garden. Institutional: medical facilities, museums, educational facilities, nursing homes, other. Residential: single family homes, two family homes (incl. conversion of larger existing single family homes), 3 to 4 family homes (incl. conversion of larger existing single family homes), multifamily buildings (more than 4 dwelling units), affordable housing (sale prices or rents restricted to be affordable for low and moderate income households), housing for special needs groups (i.e. group homes for people with disabilities). Mixed Uses: i.e. business/service on ground floor with apartments above (incl. conversion of larger existing single family homes).

6. What do you think the residents of Acton, and the Town of Acton as a governmental institution, should be doing to encourage economic development in South Acton Village?
7. If you forget for a moment the heavy rush hour traffic to and from Maynard, what do you think about the density and overall level of activity in South Acton Village? Too little, too much or just right?
8. Would you support creating potential for new growth within South Acton Village? Why? Under what circumstances? What kind of growth (i.e. business, industrial, residential)? In what time frame should such growth occur?
9. Several year ago, Acton Town Meeting has approved a sewer system serving South Acton Village and several surrounding neighborhoods as well as Kelley's Corner. Due to lack of federal and state funds this project is now delayed indefinitely. To address the immediate need (due to septic system failures), and to assist in a modest revitalization effort for South Acton Village, a small sewage treatment plant and collection system just for South Acton Village could be feasible as an alternative to the previously approved sewer system. What do you think of such an alternative solution to the "septic problem" in South Acton Village?
10. What kinds of efforts and improvements to assist the revitalization of South Acton Village would you be willing to support through taxes or special assessments? Why? Under what conditions? To what extent?

Comments:

Businesses in South Acton Village were rated by many as generally poor and the village was described as an eclectic mix of businesses. The need for a key business was emphasized that would help draw people. On the other hand, a comment was made that additional businesses or an increase in business variety in the village would be undesirable because of the bad traffic

situation, and that new businesses should be of a kind that does not generate much traffic, which would exclude most retail activities. One workshop group polled its participants on the question regarding the level of business activity: 6 judged that there was too little business, for one participant there was too much, and 2 thought that the current level of business activity was about right.

It was suggested that the commuter parking lot could be connected more directly to the village so that businesses could benefit from the commuter presence, for instance a donut/coffee shop or tea room should work well along Main Street and/or at the train stop. It was also suggested that a variety of businesses within a theme (i.e. arts, crafts) might work well for the village.

The lack of gathering places, difficulty of vehicular parking, and the limited septic capacity of the area were identified as problems. Accessibility, landscaping and pedestrian facilities were mentioned as in need of improvement. The businesses/ industries along River Street seemed out of place for some.

Most of the workshop participants would encourage the following types of land uses: small retail store (i.e. bookstore, antiques, convenience store, health food store), small scale professional office and service (i.e. travel agency, law office, doctor's office, barber shop), light manufacturing facility, artist studio and sales room, building trade shop, cottage industry/home occupation, bed & breakfast, restaurant (possibly at train stop), movie and stage theater (i.e. in the Exchange Hall, one like the Brattle Theater in Cambridge offering program movies and occasional stage performances), agriculture (no odor though), museum and educational institution, nursing home, single family residence, affordable housing, special needs housing, cluster housing.

Workshop participants were divided in their opinion with regards to: dry cleaner, laundromat, veterinarian, fast food outlet, health/fitness club, recreation facility, institutional medical facility, 2-family residence, 3-4 family residence, mixed uses.

There appeared to be agreement that the following land uses should be discouraged: Shopping Center (presumably strip mall type), funeral home, gas station, car wash, auto repair, warehouse, bar, multifamily (>4 units).

Additionally, it was suggested that land uses requiring large trucks, encouraging late night traffic, or consuming large amounts of water (for reasons of septic limitations) should be discouraged.

It was stated that the Town of Acton should do (or pressure state and federal government to do) the following in order to encourage economic development in the village: install sewers; build more sidewalks; replace Route 27 bridge; improve streets, utilities and infrastructure; change zoning; provide tax incentives; provide parking.

It was noted that most traffic passes through the village without stopping, that there too little "useful" activity. Also, that some new growth could help with the clean up and revitalization of the village and that such new growth should be encourage now but should continue at a slow pace.

Reaction to the possibility of an alternative small sewer solutions to address the village septic problem (alternative to the larger, previously approved, now not funded sewer system plan) was enthusiastic by some. Others stated that such solution should be consistent with the long term plan (whereby it was unclear whether reference was made to the 1991 Master Plan or the previously approved sewer system plans).

Some workshop participants indicated that they would be willing to pay their share towards a solution of the septic problem, improvement of the sidewalk network. A few also found it a worthwhile investment to improvements at the commuter lot to encourage increased use of the train.

Subject Area: Traffic and Transportation Infrastructure

Questions:

1. What streets in South Acton Village and its surrounding neighborhoods do not work well
a) for residential traffic? b) for local business traffic? c) for traffic moving through South Acton? Please identify the reasons.
2. What locations in South Acton Village and its surrounding neighborhoods seem unsafe? Please identify causes.
3. What locations in South Acton Village and its surrounding neighborhoods seem confusing with respect to signing and traffic control?
4. In what locations in South Acton Village and its surrounding neighborhoods are traffic controls and improvements (i.e. traffic signals, stop signs, sidewalks, crosswalks, street widening, police officer) needed?
5. What do you think of improvements at these locations if it means changing the character of the street?
6. How safe and accommodating is South Acton Village and its surrounding neighborhoods to pedestrians and bicyclists? Why? Make suggestions for improvements if needed.
7. Are local streets in South Acton Village and its surrounding neighborhoods being used as shortcuts by through traffic? What streets? Is this a big problem?
8. Are the street in South Acton Village and its surrounding neighborhoods adequately maintained?
9. Where are the specific areas of congestion in South Acton Village and its surrounding neighborhoods?
10. Do you think the commuter parking lot should be expanded? Why? How would you feel

- about a parking garage? Under what conditions would you support a parking garage?
11. What do you think about the general availability of vehicular parking spaces in South Acton Village (not including the commuter parking lot)? Are there enough spaces? Are they conveniently located? Where would additional parking be helpful? At what times is parking a problem in South Acton Village?
12. Which traffic and transportation infrastructure improvements in South Acton Village and its surrounding neighborhoods would you be willing to support through taxes or special assessments? Why? Under what conditions? To what extent?

Comments:

Streets that don't work well/problem areas:

Main Street	-	turns in/out of business driveways difficult to impossible, heavy through traffic on Main;
School and Main	-	left turns are difficult to impossible, heavy through traffic on Main;
Main and High	-	left turns difficult to impossible, heavy through traffic on Main;
Main and Maple	-	danger of rear end collision during right turn onto Maple, bad sight distance for left turn onto Maple;
Central and Main	-	difficult turns/congestion from commuter lot, heavy through traffic on Main;
Prospect and Main	-	confusing intersection;
Maple/Martin/Stow	-	somewhat confusing because of one-way rule at Maple to Main;
River Street	-	very narrow, heavy truck use;
High Street	-	narrow pavement, hidden driveways;
Martin/Stow/Liberty	-	confusing intersection, bad sight distance;

Unsafe locations were named as follows:

Main Street driveways, Main/Central,
Main/Prospect, Main/School, Main/High.

In addition, the lack of sidewalks along many streets was identified as unsafe given the high volume and speed of traffic.

Workshop participants suggested:

Better sign controls at the River/School Street intersection;

Larger Route 27 directory signs at Jones Field;

Pedestrian law signs or barrels;

Better defined crosswalks;

Through traffic restriction on Piper Road during certain busy times of the day;

Warning signs on Route 27 south bound just at or before the Route 27 bridge to warn of vehicles slowing down to make a right turn into Maple Street;

One way traffic regulations in some streets;

A traffic plan before Route 27 bridge repair begins;
Better controls at Main/High, Main School, Main/Central;

In answer to the question on how they would feel if street improvements would significantly change the character of a street, participants answered that the looks of some streets might turn to the better through street improvements, that sidewalk installation should have priority, but that street widening to accommodate vehicle speed would not be supported. There seemed to be a sense that street improvements should be carefully planned with the maintenance of a street's character in mind.

On pedestrian and bicycle safety participants commented that the conditions were not satisfactory (some said terrible), that crosswalks and sidewalks should be accessible to persons with disabilities, that crosswalks need more frequent painting, that there need to be more sidewalks, cross walks, tighter speed limits and better enforcement of speed limits.

Workshop participants identified River, Prospect and Piper are being used as short cuts or bypass routes by through traffic.

Most participants felt that streets were generally well maintained, except for isolated (but unidentified) drainage problems.

With respect to commuter parking lot, on workshop group stated a resounding "no" to any expansion of parking capacity. They felt that this would too drastically change the village character. The other group was divided on the issue. There was little support for the idea of a parking garage and then only if it comes with "nice amenities". It was pointed out that more parking should be built elsewhere, i.e. at I 495, to keep commuters from the towns west of Acton away from the Acton commuter lot, and that double tracking would increase capacity west of Acton.

On public transportation, participants would like to see a shuttle bus service from West Acton Village (and possibly other town locations) to the commuter lot. Also, the desire for improved taxi availability was noted.

On parking, it was noted that the South Acton Congregational Church as well as the Exchange Hall and the Music Center need additional parking, that the lot behind the Fire Station is too far, and that new parking should be behind buildings, not in front of buildings. It was also mentioned that the site of the old railroad depot could serve as parking lot.

Participants felt that tax money should be spent on general improvements rather than using special assessments. Specifically mentioned were sidewalks and traffic rules enforcement.

Subject Area: Open Space, Recreation and Conservation

Questions:

1. How do you rate the existing public recreation facilities in South Acton Village and its surrounding neighborhoods? Are there enough? Do they address the needs? What could be improved?
2. Which of the following are important to preserve, improve or create in South Acton Village and its surrounding neighborhoods?
Natural Resource Protection: ponds, marshes, brooks, streams, farms, unique scenic areas, woodlands, town parks.
Active Recreation Areas: ball fields, playgrounds, swimming pool, tennis courts.
Village Character/Appearance: public spaces (streets, parks)
Infrastructure: sidewalks, walk ways, bike ways.
Other?
3. Can you identify areas of environmental concern in South Acton Village and its surrounding neighborhoods? What specifically is the problem? How can the problem be addressed?
4. Which parcels of land in South Acton Village and its surrounding neighborhoods do you consider spacial and worth protecting or acquiring for recreation?
5. Are there any parcels of land in South Acton Village and its surrounding neighborhoods that you consider worth protecting for wildlife/conservation or scenic views?
6. Should public resources primarily be directed to improve existing recreation/open space facilities, or should public resources primarily be directed towards developing new facilities? If new facilities should be developed - where and what kinds?
7. Which of the open space, recreation and conservation efforts and improvements in South Acton Village and its surrounding neighborhoods would you be willing to support through taxes or special assessment? Why? Under what conditions? To what extent?

Comments:

Workshop participants were divided about the need for new ball fields. All agreed that field maintenance should be improved, and that if the Town is going to have ball fields they should all be maintained well. People were pleased to see maintenance work going on at the Jones Field. One workshop group identified access as a major problem. They mentioned the lack of parking at the Jones Field. But more importantly, they found it dangerous to walk to the fields and called for more sidewalks and better secured crosswalks. Sidewalks along High, Parker, Stow and Maple Streets was specifically stressed. It was noted that in general sidewalks and walk ways would improve safety for children, joggers and all other pedestrians, and improve connections between neighborhoods. It was noted that the stairs and pedestrian underpass at the Route 27 should be maintained better.

The septic problems in South Acton were identified as the principal environmental problem.

Most participants put a high priority on the preservation and clean up of environmental resources, first and foremost Fort Pond Brook. One suggested that possibly the Discovery Museum would like to pick up some responsibility of cleaning up Fort Pond Brook since the brook could be a great outdoor resource for them. There was also a general concern over the environmental impacts of auto repair facilities, particularly the auto body shop on Stow Street being so close to the brook, and that there might be illegal wetlands encroachments in the industrial zone between the brook and River Street.

Participants would like to see

- the old railroad spur to Maynard preserved, the trestle fixed up, and made formally accessible to the public for walking and access to Mill Pond.
- the old dams and ponds along River Street restored (at least one),
- if Lazaro Paving Co. ever moves out of its present location, a picnic/fishing/recreation facility on the site.
- a swimming pool in the area (but there is understanding that they are expensive and that it would be far shot). A swimming facility in Acton as a whole would be good.
- if Mill Pond couldn't serve as a swimming pond.
- Stonefield Farm preserved (Simeone's farm).
- vacant parcels cleaned up (Great Hill, Lazaro properties).
- better identification of conservation land.
- a Fort Pond Brook green way.

With respect to land worth protecting or acquiring for recreation or conservation, participants mentioned the railroad spur to Maynard, Stonefield Farm, land that will fold into a Fort Pond Brook greenway, particularly along River Street, and access to Mill Pond (although no access for motor boats).

The workshop groups appeared to agree that while money is tight, maintenance should be priority. When finances are better, parcels of priority should be acquired by the Town as they become available. There was agreement at least in one group that the residents need to volunteer more time and effort to develop and maintain public lands.

Participants in one group felt that general tax revenues are the most appropriate source of funding for public land purchases, recreation and infrastructure improvements. Land acquisition, sewer system, sidewalks and playground equipment were mentioned as examples for which people would support spending of tax revenues.

Subject Area: Village Character and Preservation

Questions:

1. What best describes South Acton Village's character - a business center, a typical New England village with mixture of uses and residences surrounding businesses, an unplanned mixture of business and residential uses, or other?
2. What makes this character of South Acton Village? Specific buildings or uses? Which ones? A general sense of place? What combination of landscape and building elements? What kinds of activities?
3. What do you like about the character of South Acton Village? What don't you like?
4. In what way has the character of South Acton Village been changing? What do you like about these changes? What don't you like?
5. What civic, religious, commercial, or residential structures, or layout of structures reflect important aspects of South Acton Village character or history, and should be preserved?
6. What is going on around those structures that may be detracting from their historic or aesthetic character?
7. What specific parcels of land in South Acton Village and its surrounding neighborhoods do you consider special and worth protecting - for scenic views? - for their contribution to preserving a sense of history? - for their contribution to the South Acton Village character in general?
8. What would you like to be preserved in South Acton Village and what would you like to see changed?
9. Which of the conservation and preservation efforts and other "character improvements" that you would like to see for South Acton Village would you be willing to support through taxes or special assessments? Why? Under what conditions? To what extent?

Comments:

Workshop participants characterized South Acton Village as more or less an unplanned mixture of businesses and residences in which historic patterns are still visible.

In describing what makes up the village's character participants note:

- the importance of individual buildings, i.e. Exchange Hall, Jones Tavern, building of Music Center, the old homes on Central and Maple Streets, the Worker's Hotel (end of Railroad Street?).
- the presence of only a few new buildings.
- the dominance of through traffic.
- the presence of vacant parcels and underutilized buildings.
- the Route 27 bridge across the tracks.
- the presence of Fort Pond Brook and Mill Pond.
- the proximity of conservation lands.

Participants expressed concern that the Route 27 bridge replacement might result in a structure that is detracting from the village character. The building in front of Erikson's Grain Mill was identified as a blight that should really be demolished.

It was noted that the village is missing a park, that Mill Pond needs better access, that the vacant lots along School Street, where the depot and the apartment buildings once were, should be (at least for the time being) cleaned up, loamed and seeded, that the site of the old saw mill behind Erikson's site could be picturesque if cleaned up somewhat.

Participants were specific in what they didn't like in South Acton Village:

The mini-warehouse - out of character.

The intersections - traffic signal would help.

Too many buildings are run down.

Lack of sidewalks and walk ways.

Truck traffic on side streets.

Too much pavement.

Storage trailers.

Non-conforming businesses.

Peeling and boarded up store fronts.

Appearance of just another intersection.

Lack of parking spaces.

Activities and scene dominated by cars not people

The fact that a lot of these problems are getting worse.

The appearance of the vacant parcels on Great Hill and at School Street.

Many areas overgrown with poison ivy.

Commuter parking on Maple Street.

Participants would like to see:

Signalization of Main Street intersection(s).

Better maintenance of buildings.

More sidewalks and more pedestrian friendly environment, and pedestrian accessibility to public areas, businesses, etc.

Improvements and revitalization so that village is some kind of center again.

More landscaping.

A kiosk at train stop.

Enforcement of traffic rules, particularly speed limits and pedestrian law.

Screening or fencing of School Street Garage car lot.

The following buildings, sites, views etc. were identified as worthy for preservation:

Exchange Hall, building of Music Center, Faulkner House, Jones Tavern, old homes on Central Street, homes along Maple Street, the worker's hotel (=?) Railroad Street hotel, Liberty Tree House, Old South Acton post office, South Acton Congregational Church, Fort Pond Brook, Mill

Pond, conservation lands, Jones Field, Stonefield Farm.

As detracting from the historic character the following were named:

Cars, general deterioration of buildings (Exchange Hall, building at corner of Prospect and Central), School Street Garage car lot.

One participant suggested to see if Sherwin - Williams Paints would not want to do over Exchange Hall as promotional effort.

Participants felt that the scenic vista from the village to Mill Pond should be preserved, as well as the farm buildings by Mill Pond, Stonefield Farm, existing conservation lands, and a Fort Pond Brook green corridor.

Participants felt that the Town and its resident can help retain and improve the village character by teaching history of Acton in the Schools, through organized walking tours, through better landscaping and sidewalks, by controlling commercial development, by maintaining the colonial and Victorian elements in the village, and by making sure that new buildings and structures fit with those elements (i.e. traffic lights with a "rustic" subdued appearance).

Participants expressed that town residents need to get more involved, possibly through "adopt-a- (lot, trail, brook, field, etc.) programs. This would build community and pride. Also, some suggested a business board or association that would invest together and act as group to encourage improvements and revitalization.